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WINIFRED WINTHROP;

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LADY OF ATHERTON HALL.

BY CLARA AUGUSTA.

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WINIFRED WINTHROP;

OR,

THE LADY OF ATHERTON HALL.

CHAPTER I.

THE SUSPECTED CLERK.

"The dignity of truth is lost "BEN JONSON.

ATHERTON HALL crowned a green eminence, a score of rods from the broad sweep of the Charles river; and from its windows the eye ranged over a delightful variety of scenery, hill and valley, forest and meadow land; while a couple of miles to the east, Charlestown monument lifted up its granite finger against the sky; and in a long, continuous line the spires of Boston glittered in the sunlight. The distant horizon met the sea; the sea so darkly blue, that but for the sails which dotted, here and there, its calm bosom, you would have thought an azure cloud had descended, to rest for a season upon the earth.

At the hall door, a carriage was waiting on this fair June of which we write—a sumptuous carriage, with two gray horses, and a liveried driver. Miss Winifred Atherton, the lady of Atherton Hall, pleased to take an airing.

She came down the broad steps at last: this lagging Winnifred, leaning on the arm of her father. The young lady—she had not seen more than fifteen summers—was a beautiful picture to look upon. Father and daughter were all in all to each other—the last of a noble family. The wife and mother had slept for years in the bosom of a green grave at Auburn; the blue-eyed babe of six years was nestled to her side—the only son and brother had died at sea, and been laid to rest by rough but kindly hands in the great deep.

Robert Atherton's vast wealth would go to this daughter of his. No wonder the little lady could afford to be scornful; no wonder she walked the ground like a very queen; she had been ruler at Atherton Hall so long that a spirit of command had become with her second nature.

The pair were whirled rapidly toward Boston. Mr. Atherton to his place of business, on Broad-street; Miss Winifred to spend the day with Mrs. Marchmont, on Beacon-street.

The carriage was nearly opposite the police-office, when it suddenly came to a halt, its further progress impeded by a crowd about the door of the tribunal.

Winifred contented herself with tapping the velvet carpet for awhile with her dainty foot, then she grew impatient, and spoke.

"What is the cause of this delay?"

"Some trial of interest, going on here, I should conclude, from the number of curious ones assembled," returned Mr. Atherton.

"Well, then, if we are to remain here, I see not why we should miss of gratifying our curiosity by witnessing the remarkable performance. I am going in to see for myself. It will be something entirely novel for me."

"My daughter! Winifred Atherton! you go into a police-court! What can you be thinking of?"

"You are brow-stricken, papa, but you will go in with me, I know."

Her hand pressed his arm; those eyes, so like her dead mother's, looked into his. He never could resist Winnifred when in that mood.

"It is very foolish in you, my dear, to wish to mix with yonder vulgar crowd."

He alighted from the carriage, and handed Winifred out. The interest of the court-room was turned from the prisoner to center around the millionaire and his daughter. The scene within the office was by no means an uncommon one in a large city. A young man of about sixteen was arraigned to be tried for forgery. The circumstances, as evolved by the evidence, were briefly these:

Gerard Middleton had been under-clerk in the wholesale dry-goods establishment of Chambers & Marshall. He had

enjoyed the confidence of his employers for two years; and his prompt attention to business had won the esteem of all connected with the store, except, perhaps, that of Charles Cooper, the accountant, between whom and young Middleton there had ever existed one of those mutual antipathies for which we often find it so difficult to assign a reason.

A fortnight previously, the name of the firm had been forged to a paper of importance—a draft upon the Blackstone Bank for nine hundred dollars. The check was presented by Gerard, thrown out as ungenuine by the paying teller, and the

clerk was detained on a charge of forgery.

The culprit stood before his judges, pale but composed; handsome he certainly was; and his bearing was quite as haughty as though he counted his money by the thousand dollars, instead of lacking a solitary copper. His defense was, simply, innocence. He had no knowledge of the check until it came, duly signed, into his hands; he was perfectly and entirely innocent. When did ever a statement of this kind, coming from one accused, have any weight? His employers looked upon it as a hardened evasion of the truth, and Middleton was about to be carried to prison in default of bail for fifteen hundred dollars.

Winifred's quick apprehension caught the facts of the case instantly; her heart responded sympathizingly to the look of desperate despair on the youth's face. She pressed her father's arm to secure his attention.

"Will you bail this Gerard Middleton, papa?"

"No, indeed! The saints forbid!" cried Mr. Atherton, in

righteous indignation.

"Then I must do it instead!" said Winnifred, with determination, and moving to the side of the magistrate, she spoke a few words in his ear. The good man started, frowned, and then smiled:

"My dear young lady, it is without precedent—this proposal of yours. It is not common for young girls to offer bail for

reckless characters like this Middleton."

"Granted. Nor yet were deluges common, but one occurred, nevertheless, in the time of Noah."

"If Miss Atherton is serious, and her father consents, no more can be said. Mr. Atherton, sir, we await your decision."

"Winifred may have her way. She is all I have to indulge, and she has taken a fancy to see the lad released. I will give bonds for him myself," returned Mr. Atherton, with much good humor; and directly the necessary papers being drawn up and signed, Gerard Middleton was pronounced at liberty.

He advanced to the side of Miss Atherton, and held out his hand. She put her jeweled fingers into his clasp. No word was uttered, but the dark brilliant eyes of the youth spoke most eloquently his gratitude. For a moment he looked into her face—then with a slight bend of his fine figure to the people in the court-room, he passed out.

"Well, daughter," said Mr. Atherton, when they were once more seated in the carriage, "you have liberated the young

scamp; what do you propose to do with him?"

"Do with him? Why, you will take him into the store, of course."

"There is not a single vacant place in the whole concern, and if there were a hundred, I would not admit one like him."

"If there is no vacancy, you must create a new place to be filled. A place for this Gerard Middleton's special benefit."

"Not to save his head!"

"Very well. Then I will find a situation for him."

"Eh! what?"

"Fall in love with his handsome face, and invite him to elope with me, if nothing more favorable offers. Our names would sound finely together, in the Morning Herald."

"Winifred Atherton, you will be in a lunatic asylum yet!

Elope with him indeed! Elope with a rascally clerk!"

"I shall be obliged to do so, father, unless you can put him in some place where he can earn his living; for, you see, a clerk has to eat, and drink, and wear coats like other men."

Mr. Atherton winced; he was used to this matter-of-fact dealing from his girl, and yet he did not like it.

"Perhaps I can get him into Porter's grocery as errand

boy. Too good for him, I dare say."

"And I will not permit him to go there to be ordered about by cross husbands and sour old maids, buying half a pound of sugar, and two ounces of tea. Recollect, Mr. Gerard is my property now." "Well, well, I will see about it. Perhaps Dalton can let

him into his department to assist in the job work."

"Nothing of the kind, dear papa. I veto that plan entirely. This boy has a proud spirit, or I have failed to read his face aright. He shall not be humbled in that way. It would make him reckless; perhaps, lead him to crime. Show him that you have confidence in his integrity, and he will die rather than forfeit your good opinion. He must be nothing less than a clerk!"

"Winifred, what a famous little autocrat you would make for the Russians. Every man's head in the empire would be struck off in a week, who refused to swear fullest allegiance to your madcap plots."

"Dear sir, you flatter me. Shall my despotic ladyship be indulged, and thus Gerard become the respected incumbent of a respectable and lucrative situation in the hardware estab-

lishment of Robert Atherton & Co.?"

"Yes, yes; I will hunt him up if only to rid myself of your teasing. He will be a drawback upon me, no doubt; forge my name, or steal my bank-notes, but he shall have some situation with me, if it be only to stand by my elbow and wipe my pens."

"Very good. You are philanthropic, father mine, for which

I kiss your cheek; and here we are!"

The coach drew up before a splendid stone mansion. In a few moments Winifred and pretty little Mrs. Marchmont were exchanging their delighted greetings in the shaded drawing-room; while Mr. Atherton, both vexed and amused with this new penchant of his daughter's, was borne rapidly down to his warehouses on Broad-street.

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CHAPTER II.

LIGHT AND SHADE.

"But the suns will shine, and the rains will fall,
On the loftiest, lowliest spot;
And there's mourning and merriment mingled for all
That inherit the human lot."

GERALD MASSEY.

Mr. Atherton was as good as his word. Gerard Middleton was sought, found, and installed as assistant-correspondent in the counting-room of the wealthy merchant.

Young Middleton's history, previous to this time, was that of many another of his class. His father had been a poor but talented artist, who, dying young, left his widow and their child, Gerard, in a state of painful indigence. Mrs. Middleton came from a wealthy, as well as haughty family, and, having been disowned and cast off by these relatives, for wedding the man of her choice, she had too much of her kindred's stern pride, now, in her destitution to call upon them for assistance.

For three years she worked uninterruptedly for the tailor's shops in Boston, receiving in payment barely sufficient to keep soul and body together. The incessant toil and anxiety so wrought upon her slender frame that she was brought to a bed of sickness, from which she never arose. The kind physician—poor like herself—who, out of the Christian benevolence of his heart, visited her, said that only healthful food and country air could restore her. As well might he have prescribed the melted pearls of Cleopatra, or the powder of the Koh-i-noor diamond. For days the meager room where she dwelt was without fire—and night after night the darling boy went to his rude bed fasting, because there was no bread!

Mrs. Middleton's powers of life wasted away, and with hands meekly folded upon her breast, she committed herself to the care of the God whom she was not afraid to trust. He, seeing how weary of earth was her spirit, severed the silver thread, and rent in twain the golden bowl. Gerard Middleton

was crushed by the words of the physician, who had remained until the last:—"You are motherless."

The boy was ten years old; bright, active, and intelligent—and yet he was carried to the workhouse. There were privileges of learning there—and these he improved to the utmost. When thirteen, he was taken into the office of a legal gentleman as copyist. Here he remained a year or more, when his superior penmanship attracted the attention of Mr. Chambers, senior member of a dry goods' firm, and after a little settlement of preliminaries, Gerard was domiciled with his new employers.

His only friend, during all this time, was Ruth Mowbray—a pauper, as he, himself, had been. Both of Ruth's parents had died in coming to this country from England; and their daughter had been consigned, by the captain of the vessel, to the home of the poor, immediately on their arrival in port.

Ruth was two years Gerard's junior; a beautiful fair-haired, blue-eyed girl; untainted by the associations which had of late surrounded her, and pure in heart as the white water-lily.

The boy and the girl had continued like brother and sister: and as soon as Gerard was able to earn something, he insisted on sharing his pittance with her. Through his influence with Mr. Chambers, Ruth was received into the millinery store of Madame De Lanier, on Washington-street, as an apprentice; where her engaging manners, and lovely face, attracted many a customer to her employer's counter.

Gerard Middleton had been but a few days in his new situation, when Mr. Atherton invited him to ride out to the Hall, and pass the night. It was not exactly a cordial invitation, for the rich merchant had many doubts regarding his clerk.

But it was Winifred's expressed pleasure to see the suspected forger, and her father could deny her nothing which had the shadow of reason about it.

Middleton was received, by the young mistress of the Hall, with much kindness; and after tea, she sat herself to work at sounding the attainments and qualifications of her protégé. Winifred was a close questioner, and Middleton was obliged to confess that he knew no language save his own, and that rather imperfectly; that he could not sing, play, or cut a figure in the dance.

"Very well," said Winifred, composedly—"I will teach you Latin and French. Sometime when I go into business for myself, I am going to make you my foreign agent, and then the tongues of other nations will be of benefit to you."

"The Latin, in particular," observed Mr. Atherton.

"To be sure, if he should be engaged in purchasing medicines, as I suppose he will; for you know, papa, I have serious thoughts of becoming a female physician."

"A female fiddle stick!" retorted Mr. Atherton, indignantly. Winifred was used to this mood of her father's, so it did not trouble her in this instance, and she made an engagement to commence her lessons on the following evening. Mr. Atherton would bring the pupil up in his carriage, at night, and take him back in the morning, she said; and Mr. Atherton was obliged to nod assentingly.

And thus it happened that Gerard Middleton came daily within the influence of this proud, but warm-hearted girl. And during those quiet seasons at her side, he learned to know the meaning of every curl of her red lip, every toss of her queenly head; he learned to fear offending her, to love to toil for her approbation; to look upon her as upon the evening star, so gorgeously beautiful, yet so very far above his reach.

During six months this quiet continued, and then the time appointed for his appearance at court drew nigh. Gerard felt restless and uneasy; he feared condemnation, more because it would shut him away from his star, than because of his own disgrace and humiliation.

It was the evening previous to the day on which his guilt or innocence was to be established. Gerard sat by the side of Winifred, repeating his task, when a note was brought in and placed before him. He broke it open, ran his eye greedily over the contents, while a flush of joy mounted to his pale cheek. He gave it to Winifred—she read it aloud:

"Mr. Gerard Middleton:—I am on the eve of departure for Europe. I am purposing to confess to Messrs. Chambers & Marshall the guilt which I now confess to you. I forged that check upon the Blackstone Bank, and caused you to be sent to draw it, because I hated you. I asked you once to introduce me to the pretty seamstress, Ruth Mowbray, and you refused, call-

ing me some bad names that it is useless to repeat. I wanted to be revenged on you, but, as I am rather a good fellow, I am willing to be generous, especially as I can afford it, having recently fallen heir to a fortune of a hundred thousand pounds, waiting for me in merry old England. I run no risk in exonerating you; as, with my poverty, I renounce forever the plebeian name of Charles Cooper."

There was a light of triumph in Winifred's eyes as she finished reading.

"Well, father, what do you think now of my discernment?"

"It seems you were right, Winnie; and I beg Middleton's pardon for distrusting him; but let us have no scenes. Go on with your conjugations."

All through the winter and early spring, Winifred devoted herself to her self-imposed task of teaching her father's clerk, and the most sanguine teacher must have been astonished at the progress made by the scholar. Gerard's intellect was quick and vigorous; and he caught at all sources of knowledge with avidity—just such an avidity as was pleasing to the exacting nature of Miss Atherton.

Late in May came Winifred's sixteenth birthday, and the quiet of the hall was entirely broken up. On the evening which made her sixteen, the heiress was to be presented to society—brought out in a grand reception-ball. Preparations for this great event went rapidly forward, and Middleton's visits were interrupted. Presents from attached friends poured in upon the young beauty, in lavish profusion; diamonds and pearls sparkled, and mingled together upon her dressing-table; and bouquets of costly blossoms perfumed the spacious alcoves of the wide drawing-room.

Winifred had pressed Gerard to be present at the reception—he had declined with a painful blush, which did not escape the eye of the petted heiress. An engagement, he said, would prevent him from enjoying the pleasure Miss Atherton so kindly offered him. Winifred's face flushed hotly; but she only said—very well, Mr. Middleton was at liberty to do as he chose.

Gerard did not tell her that this engagement-this walk to

Chelsea with Ruth Mowbray—could be indefinitely postponed as well; he did not tell her that his only reason for declining to be present at the *fête*, was because he had not, in the wide world, money enough to purchase a suit of clothes fitting to wear to such an aristocratic assembly.

Just before the hour set apart for the arrival of the guests, while Winifred was yet at her toilet, a simple cluster of wild arbutus flowers, fresh and sweet in their pink fragrance, came to her, with the name of Gerard Middleton written on a slip of paper which entwined the slender stems.

Those pure flowers found a resting-place in the silver glossiness of her hair that night, but Gerard was not there to witness the effect, and none knew the secret, but envied the giver.

Winifred Atherton was flattered to her heart's fullest content. She could not have wished for a denser cloud of incense than that which hung around her wherever she moved. Proud heads bent low before her—strong hearts beat quicker at her smile, and in all that crowd of youth and loveliness there were none to compare with Winifred. She sang—her voice was rich and sweet and powerful: and she played with the touch of a Thalberg. She conversed—her lively wit, her tact, and versatility astonished and charmed her listeners.

Milford Winthrop, the wealthy, influential, and talented barrister, for once, acknowledged the power of beauty. He was
twice Winifred's age; a tall, grave, stately man, with an unlimited good opinion of himself. Report vaguely whispered
that there were circumstances connected with this man's first
youth that, if known, would confer no luster on his character;
but he was rich and powerful—and no one cared to revive
old, half-forgotten memories.

Through the season of gayety which succeeded her birth-day-party, she was the queen of every assembly, the grand center about which a train of satellites revolved. But in spite of all this homage, she grew colder and colder until her half-hopeless adorers called her The Heart of Ice; and yet they persisted in fluttering around her, hoping, perhaps, to melt the frosty mail.

Gerard Middleton never came to the house now; Winifred

saw him only at rare intervals, when she called with some gay party, at her father's store, to assist in selecting bronzes and costly candelabras for some newly-wedded friend. At such times he never greeted her, unless she first addressed him. He never lifted his face to hers, though the crimson deepened on his cheek, and the pen he held moved unsteadily over the paper. There was little of the cur about this proud clerk; he would not fawn about the hand that might, the next moment, thrust him away.

Toward the close of October, a party was made up for an excursion to Mt. Holyoke, and a week's sojourn in its romantic vicinity. Mr. Winthrop was to accompany Miss Atherton; Mr. and Mrs. Marchmont and other friends were to be of the

party.

It was a cloudless morning when they set forth—all anticipating a merry time, and all in good spirits. Winifred saw, with some surprise, that Gerard Middleton occupied a seat near her, and she spoke of it to Mr. Winthrop, who said that Mr. Atherton had sent the clerk out to Springfield on business connected with his trade.

The train proceeded steadily and safely; every wheel performed its duty. They reached a long bridge built over an arm of the Chicopee river. There was a momentary trembling of the timbers, as the engine plunged over them—then Winifred heard a dull, dead crash—she was sensible of nothing more, until Mr. Middleton, snatching her up in his arms, dashed with her out upon the platform. Not a moment's pause did he make to reply to her indignant speech of resistance, but with one athletic bound, he cleared the tottering platform, and leaped with his burden into the water!

Bearing her up with one arm, he struck out for the shore with the other, and in a few moments Winifred, cold and dripping, stood upon the firm sand. Her cheeks burned crimson, and her eyes flashed haughtily as she confronted the

young man.

"Sir, what means this insult?"

He lifted his hand and pointed n the direction of the train they had just quit.

"Look and see!" he said, calmly.

She did look, and all the pride and scorn went out of her

face. The cheeks grew white—the eyes lost their angry brilliancy. She put her hand in his for support and sympathy. His fingers closed over hers, but neither spoke while they gazed together upon the sad scene.

The bridge, its massive timbers broken in the center, lay tossing about in the swift current of the river; the mighty engine had half buried its shattered body in the hard gravel on the opposite side; and the cars, in one crushed, confused mass, were piled up against the abutment of the bridge.

The unfortunate passengers, such of them as were left alive, were making their egress from broken windows and rent doors—some with faces pale and bloody, others uninjured.

Of the latter class was Mr. Winthrop; who, without delay, hastened to the side of Miss Atherton to offer his congratulations on her escape. He thanked Mr. Middleton coldly for the service he had done the lady, and drawing her hand within his arm, led her away to the nearest dwelling-house.

Middleton bowed haughtily to this coolly expressive gratitude, and turned his back upon the speaker. What did he care for the scorn of the rich man, so long as the soft hand of Winifred had pressed his?—and her eyes looked, wet with tears, into his face! He knew she was not all ice.

When Mr. Atherton heard of the conduct of his clerk, he was filled with admiration and gratitude, and thanked the young man in a torrent of enthusiasm wrung from the depths of his parental love.

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CHAPTER III.

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THE MIDNIGHT BRIDAL.

"Mine after life! What is mine after life?
My day is closed. The gloom of night comes on—
A hopeless darkness settles o'er my fate."

JOANNA BAILLIE.

OF course, the excursion to Holyoke was broken up; three of the pleasure-seekers were among the dead; and several were severely wounded.

For a time, the shadow of this melancholy accident dampened the spirit of gayety in the circles were the dead unfortunates had moved; but ere long the occurrence was forgotten.

Balls, soirées, and mas querades followed each other in rapid succession. At each bright assembly Winifred Atherton shone pre-eminent. Mr. Winthrop was still her constant cavalier. She would look splendidly at the head of his table, she would do the honors of his house right royally; she had a fine figure for displaying the costly fabrics in which he should be proud to see his wife clothed: in his heart he fated her to become Mrs. Winthrop, the mistress of Maplewood.

Valentine's Eve arrived, cold and frosty—and on this evening Mrs. Marchmont was to give a grand ball. Of course Miss Atherton was expected to be present, the belle, par excellence.

Winifred stood before the tall mirror, in her dressing-room, that wintry afternoon, and watched the effect of the crimson velvet robe, in which the nimble fingers of her maid were arraying her. There were gleaming rubies on her arms and around her throat; precious gems which had just been brought in—bearing on their richly chased clasps the simple inscription—

"To Winifred, from her father."

The eyes of the brilliant beauty fell on the rosy glitter of

the jewels; she bowed down her head, and kissed the bracelet which clasped her snowy wrist—murmuring softly—

"Dear papa! how kind and tender he is! How could I

live without his love?"

The maid finished the exquisite coiffure; the last curl was arranged, the last fold of lace in its place; and Winifred, with a book in her hand, sat down to await the coming of her father. Time passed swiftly; the ebony clock on the chimney struck out another hour, and still Mr. Atherton lingered.

The lady grew impatient. Mrs. Marchmont would be offended if she were late at the ball. She rose at last, and

turned to go down-stairs.

"Tell my father, when he comes, that I waited a full hour for him to see my dress, and—good heavens! what means this confusion below?"

She flew down the stairs at a bound. The hall was thronged with men, wearing pale and solemn countenances. She would have rushed through the crowd to the parlor, whither some shrouded object was being borne, but a strong arm held her back, and drew her into a side-room. The door was closed, and the man placed his back against it, thus preventing her attempted escape.

She lifted her face imploringly to his.

"What is it, Gerard Middleton! Has any thing happened to my father?"

Gerard was very pale, but his voice was calm and even. He took in his own the hand she had unconsciously laid on his arm.

"Be composed, Miss Atherton. You have fortitude-bring it to your aid."

"Fortitude! oh yes; I can bear any thing! Only tell me the worst! Suspense will kill me! is my father dead?"

"No; thank God, he is not dead!"

"But he is dying! I read it in your face! Out of my way, this moment, sir! I will go to him! My place is at his side!"

"The surgeon is examining his injuries. You must wait.

"Wait! I can not wait! Wait! and my father—the only one I have a right to love—dying! Again I ask you, tell me the worst."

"Sit down then; your fearful looks make me tremble for your reason. Your father was passing along Water-street an hour ago,—they are taking down some old buildings there,—and a falling timber struck him on the forehead. He was raised up senseless, and by the physician's orders we have brought him home."

"Do they say he will die senseless? Will he never be able to speak again?"

"Miss Atherton, your very calmness terrifies me. Have

you no tears to shed? no groans to utter?"

"Tears! will they bring my father back to health? Tears are a mockery. Tell me if he will speak to me again—before the eternal silence comes?"

"In all probability, yes. When his shocked system shall recover from this stupor."

"You would tell me that pain will restore him?"

"Perhaps so."

"Well, then, so be it. Mr. Middleton, look at me. Am I not composed and serene? Do you see any manifestation of emotion and spasm of suffering?"

"I see a stone statue!"

"Very good. Statues do not feel. Therefore take me to my father."

He led the way, she followed; and the two passed on to the couch of the wounded man. Mr. Atherton lay upon a bed which had been hastily arranged in the center of the room; his eyes were closed, and his brow bound with a white cloth.

Winifred approached and touched his cheek with her hand. The motion revived him; he opened his eyes and spoke—

"Winifred, my daughter, is it you?"

"It is I, father."

"You are calm; thank heaven for that! you are calm, and yet you are very pale, Winifred?"

"Yes, I am composed—perhaps a little pale, but that is nothing. My heart beats steadily—my limbs do not tremble."

"No. And for this I rejoice. I had feared otherwise. My child, your father is dying; you will soon be a desolate orphan—alone, and without kindred."

A sharp spasm shook her frame—the marble stillness of her

face was troubled, but she recovered herself almost immediately.

"I am going to leave you, Winifred; and before I go, you must be provided with a legal protector. You are too young and beautiful to be left without a guardian."

"Well, father."

"My daughter, I am about to require of you an act of instant obedience to a wish I have never before expressed in your hearing. Within this room, before the lapse of another hour, you must become the wife of Milford Winthrop!"

Winifred staggered back like one stricken by a rifle-ball; her face would be no whiter when the grave-sods pressed

down upon it.

"God forbid!" she ejaculated, in horrified accents.

"It is as I had expected, You are shocked at such unseemly haste. You think, perhaps, that Mr. Winthrop will share in that feeling. Let me assure you that you are mistaken. Months ago, he asked of me my daughter's hand, and I told him he must wait until you had time to love him. In this man I have full confidence; I would trust him with my life—I am not afraid to confide to him my dearest treasure—my Winifred. Knowing that you are his wife, I can die content; the grave will have no thorns for me. This is no senseless chimera of a fevered brain; it is the firmly grounded resolve of one, who, as a dying man, discerns all things more clearly the nearer he approaches that country where we shall see no more through a glass darkly."

The sufferer paused to regain strength: Winifred drew her-

self up resolutely.

"Ask any thing but that, my father! Require my life, and it shall be given up to you! But this thing I can not do."

"You must do it, Winifred Atherton! there is no room for a single doubt on that point. I, your father, command it! By your fears of my dying curse, dare to disobey!"

"I must dare it, father! I would defy the powers of the

infernal regions, rather than perjure myself at the altar !"

Mr. Atherton fell back; a terrible change passed over his face. A deadly pallor settled on his lips—his eyes grew fixed and glassy. Winifred sprang forward and raised his head to her bosom.

"Speak to me once more, father! Bless me—your little Winifred—before you go!"

He turned his face away from her, and moaned out, feebly—
"Little did I think my own girl would inflict this grief on
her old father! Little did I think that my death-hour would
be embittered by that child's disobedience! The few brief
moments I have to live must be cut short; my death hastened
by the wilfulness of my only daughter!"

His words cut her to the heart. She fell on her knees by

the bedside, and cried brokenly-

"Do with me as you will! I can not listen to such reproaches as these, and live!"

Mr. Atherton's face brightened; with one feeble arm he drew her head down on his bosom, and kissed her icy lips.

"God in heaven bless my daughter! She will make her father's death-bed a couch of ease!"

Mr. Winthrop came forward from the window where he had been standing, and took the cold, passive hand of the girl in his. At a sign from Mr. Atherton, a gray-haired, mild-faced old man advanced, and stood up before the waiting trio.

Gerard Middleton, pale, and unaccountably agitated, rose to

leave the apartment.

A look from Winifred stopped him. She went over to his side, and said—

"Stay with me, Gerard. Stay and see me changed to stone. So merry and glad a wedding should not lack a groomsman."

And Gerard closed the door he had opened, and came back to the bedside.

It was a sad and solemn ceremony. The bride in her robes of crimson; her face whiter than the lace on her bosom; her lips cold and passionless; her eyes brilliant and hard as polished steel. The bridegroom, self-sustained, handsome, and triumphant; the dying man propped up on his pillows to look at the strange sacrifice.

The words were said; the responses uttered in the clear voice of the girl, and the calm, assured tones of the man; the lips of the haughty Winthrop touched the brow of his wife—and the fervent blessing of the expiring man was pronounced

in a feeble voice, upon the newly wedded pair.

The great clock on the hall stairs pealed forth twelve strokes; the wintry winds rose to a fierce blast in the tortured elm-trees; and through the lonely aisles and corridors of the hall the wind-voices sighed and moaned like tombless spirits.

And out into the night and darkness—out upon the unknown sea, whose waves wash the shores of eternity, went the soul of Rebert Atherton, to meet its Judge; while stark and motionless lay the earthly part, shrouded for the coffin rest.

During the three days preceding the funeral, while the remains of Mr. Atherton lay in state, Winifred Winthrop wandered about the darkened rooms, pale and stern as a Nemesis. Not a feature of her frozen face softened; not a tear dimmed

the brilliancy of her glittering eye.

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, was the body of her father committed. In a carriage covered with black plumes, and drawn by sable horses, she followed it to Mount Auburn; she went down to the very door of the tomb, and saw the coffin laid by that of her mother; she turned away as the iron gate swung inward, and shut that beloved form forever from her sight—not a trace of emotion disturbed the marble immobility of her countenance.

Why should she weep and weary heaven with vain prayers? Was not her miserable fate decided?

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CHAPTER IV.

THE REST OF THE PARTY OF THE PA

THE SEVERING.

"Drip! drip, oh, rain!
From the sky beclouded eaves!
Wail! wail, oh wind,
That sweepest the wither'd leaves!
Sigh! sigh, oh, heart—
That vainly seekest rest!
Moan! moan, oh, heart,
By grief and care oppress'd!"

HOUSEHOLD WORDS.

One night more beneath the beloved roof of Atherton Hall—one night more of liberty—and then Winifred was to go forth from its blessed shelter, to dwell in the stately mansion of her husband. Maplewood was a sea-side residence, a few miles above the ancient town of Plymouth, and so far away from Boston that Mr. Winthrop would not be at home more than twice a week, and for this Winifred felt grateful. The slavery, she thought, would be more tolerable while the master was absent.

This last night in the halls of her childhood, she had demanded solitude; her maid was forbidden to intrude; and she asked of Mr. Winthrop, as a special favor, immunity from his society.

The night was bitter cold; the snow fell fiercely from an angry sky, and the icy north wind whirled over the earth as though bent on an errand of destruction. For a couple of hours Winifred paced the chamber restlessly; at last she paused before a window, and throwing open the casement, leaned out into the darkness. The fury of the storm filled her with a wild delight. It was like the commotion in her own soul. She threw a shawl over her head, and stepping into the corridor, listened intently to satisfy herself that the household was wrapt in slumber.

Then she glided down the back staircase, undrew the great

bolts of the outer door softly, and emerged into the cold and gloom. The piercing wind made her shiver, but the freshness and freedom of its breath gave her a mad strength, and she went on down the lawn, heedless of the drifts whose billowy whiteness obstructed the pathway.

On and on, her hand pressed hard against her heart, she flew; she had reached the pine copsewood at the foot of the meadow, and was losing herself in its depths of shadow, when an outstretched human arm stayed her progress. A voice,

strangely familiar, said:

"Winifred! Winifred! where are you fleeing?"

"Let me go! Let me go, Gerard Middleton! I am in no

mood for company !"

"You shall not go until I tell you of the life-wrecked and the heart-broken! of the terrible agony which another than yourself is enduring! Oh, why, why had I not been born a peer, or you a pauper?"

"It was not so decreed. And wherefore ask that question?

It could not have changed my fate!"

"Winifred, our stations in life are different; a wide gulf in society separates us; but before God we are equal. As a friend, as an equal, I ask you do you love this man whom you have wedded?"

"Love him? It is desecrating the holy word of love to

speak it in connection with his name."

"Winifred—I can not call you by your new title—one query more. Deem me what you will, I must relieve my heart of this crushing burden of doubt. Loving him not, do you love another?"

His face was close to hers; the dark intensity of his eyes searched her countenance. She did not speak, but the moon burst through its treble vail of clouds, and the pure ray of light fell down on the burning flush which crimsoned the cheek, brow, and bosom of the trembling girl. He was answered.

"For this moment, Winifred, I am happy. In loving, and being beloved, why should despair find a place to dwell?"

"In being beloved!" she cried, bitterly; "has not the earth closed over the only one who loved me? Is not my path through life to lead me always over barren fields and streamless deserts?"

"None to love you! Would to Heaven, Winifred, that I could tear out my heart, and fling it at your feet, that, seeing

all its anguished throbbing, you might be convinced!"

She comprehended him—she knew then how well and earnestly she had been loved; for a moment the earth swam before her, then all her woe and despair surged forth in two simple words:

"Too late !"

His arms opened to enfold her—they held her madly to his breast; his lips rained down passionate kisses upon her face.

"It might have been! O God!"

She tore herself away and stood erect-pale and cold as a

chiseled statue.

"Gerard Middleton, I am a wife. My time of weakness is past; I am strong in the determination to do my duty! This love which might have created for us an earthly Paradise must, henceforth, make us strangers! To-night I bid you farewell forever!"

She held out her hand. He bowed his forehead upon it

and said:

"The decree is just! Farewell!"

The next moment Gerard Middleton stood alone; and through the snow and sleet a dark figure made its hasty way up the avenue to Atherton Hall.

In the gray of the morning there was a knock at the door of the tiny cottage which served Ruth Mowbray both for a shop and dwelling-house. Ruth was mistress of her trade now

and in business for herself, in a humble way.

The gentle mistress of the place unclosed the door, and admitted Gerard Middleton. She gave him a loving sister's greeting—the two were very dear to each other—and set a chair for him by the cheerful little fire. She noticed his pale face and abstracted air, but she was a true and faithful friend to him—therefore she forbore troubling with perplexing questions.

He gazed into the fire; she sewed diligently; both silent, yet both anxious. At length he started up, and flung himself down on the chintz-covered lounge—the only article of luxury which the frugal room contained.

"Ruth," he said, impatiently, "put down that work, and come and sit here by my side. I having confession to make."

She blushed, and her small hands trembled as she laid aside the garment on which she had been engaged. He drew her down on the lounge and retained the hand he had taken. She did not shrink from the touch; she rested herself in the perfect and child-like confidence she felt in him.

"You will call me presumptuous; you will say my punish-

ment is just; but oh, Ruth, I am very miserable!"

The calm, blue eyes of the girl were lifted to his earnest sympathy. She stroked back the bright hair from his temples with her soft fingers, saying simply:

"I am sorry, Gerard."

"Yes; I know you are, my child, and so I have come to you to pour out my distress. I am but a boy—nineteen years have but just passed over me, and yet I have all the strength and passion of manhood! I have awakened to the joy and sorrow of life—have known the honey and gall of existence—I have loved!"

She started, blushed; and then turned white as December snow.

"I have loved one as far above me as the stars are above the earth! A proud, beautiful, but tender-hearted girl! And for all her wealth and pride and beauty, she loved me in return!"

Ruth's disengaged hand shaded her face; she did not look up as she said:

"Well?"

"She loved me, but by the command of her father—her dying father—she wedded a man whom she loathes! My fate is black, but it is morning light compared with hers! Only think of it, Ruth; compelled to cling for life to one for whom she feels only aversion and hatred!"

"And you loved her, Gerard—you loved her deeply and strongly as you will never love again? You will keep unto her, and her only, as long as time with you shall endure!"

He marveled at the singular brilliancy of those blue eyes; he wondered at the blush which made her cheeks like damask roses—but oh, so dull of comprehension is man! he understood it not.

"Yes, Ruth, I loved her thus! No other woman will ever enter into her place in my heart; no other footstep will wake the echoes of that sealed chamber where her love is buried. Henceforth, I ignore the existence of Love; I live only for Fame and Fortune!"

His voice took a hard, stern tone as he proceeded, and his face looked cold and gray as hammered granite. Ruth, pale silent, leaned against the wainscot. He went up to her, alarmed by her still rigidity.

"What ails you, dear Ruth? Why do you stand there so

like a frozen thing?"

"I am cold;" she drew near the fire. "It is a bitter morning!"

"Yes, truly; and your arms are bare. Let me wrap this shawl around you."

"Thank you; and now go on. I am listening."

"I have little more to add, except that I am going away—where I scarcely know; but I must flee from the place which holds her. I will not remain to tempt her and expose my own weakness. And now, Ruth, if, in after years, you shall hear men speak of Gerard Middleton as a cold, loveless being, you will remember that he once had a heart, but that a cruel fate took away its vitality and left it lead."

"Yes, I will remember."

"That is well. I must go now, Ruth, and God bless you. It may be a long, long time until I see you again. God, in heaven, bless and prosper you!"

He held her for a moment in his brotherly arms, kissed her

cheek with affection, and went from the house.

And Ruth, staggering back to a seat, cried out in sharp despair:

"Yes; he said it would be a long time ere we met again! and so it will! the length and darkness of the grave lies between then and now!"

CHAPTER V.

THE WAGES OF DESPAIR.

"The bleak wind of March
Made her tremble and shiver;—
But not the dark arch,
Or the black flowing river;
Mad from life's history,
Glad to death's mystery
Swift to be hurled—:
Anywhere, anywhere,
Out of the world."

HOOD.

Growing up to youth together, it was not strange that Gerard Middleton and Ruth Mowbray should be tenderly endeared to each other. Both were orphans, both were poor—both were struggling through the world to obtain a subsistence by manual labor. It was but natural, then, that their attachment should be strong, and their regard for each other deep and steadfast.

With Gerard this affection was that of a tender brother for a dear sister; with Ruth, it was the all-absorbing passion of her life. She never thought of happiness where Gerard was not; never dreamed of a heaven from whence he was excluded.

Purely and entirely she loved him; her life she would have given, any day, to have saved him a pang; all her hopes and joys were centered around him. She never paused to think of the consequences of this ardent love; she would have blushed with veriest shame if it had been said to her, even in sport, "You love this Gerard Middleton."

Yet in her true and loyal heart, she yielded up all on the

shrine of this earthly idol.

Fearfully had she been punished! The golden dream had vanished. The skies, lately so radiant, were gray and cold; earth stretched out before her a barren and dreary desert—there was no joy; no hope; no merciful grace there! Why should she stay to drag out a loveless existence in sorrow and

tears? Why should her hair be blanched white by the weight of years, and her eyes grow dim with age before the sleep of the grave—its sweet, dreamless sleep came upon her.

She had not the courage to look the grim future in the face! The faith was small; her trust in God's gracious Providence weak. She said to herself she would go down to death, and thus rid her heart of its burden. There was rest in dust.

There would be none to mourn for her; Gerard, perhaps, might shed a few tears, but they would dry soon, and her name would pass from his remembrance. One little plunge beneath the bosom of the sparkling river—a little chillness as the great change crept on—a wondering of strangers over the drowned girl—and all would be over!

The night set in dark with storm clouds. There was a dull, sleety breeze blowing; the tempest of yesterday had spent its fury, but the skirts of its garments yet trailed over

the earth.

Ruth put her little room in order, trimmed the lamp, and lighted a fire in the chimney-place. You would have thought, from her scrupulous exactness, that a favored and welcome visitor was expected. When every thing was arranged, she folded her shawl over her shoulders, and locking the door of the cottage behind her, she took the path through the snow, to the river.

She stood upon the high bank above the boiling flood—listened to the hollow murmur of the wind in the leafless trees, and the low gurgling voices of the waters as they hurried past.

A momentary trembling seized her:—a cold hand seemed clutching at the warm fountains of her life—but she conquered the emotion, for the grave was not colder than the world—the desolate, heartless world!

She lifted her hands to heaven and cried aloud—" God receive me!"

The fatal spring was made—the earth crumbled from under her feet—the chill air from the river swept up and made her shudder—but she did not fall. A strong hand held her back a grave, solemn voice said:

"Child! what would you do?"

[&]quot;I would die!" she said, simply.

"Die! has God, then, called you? Do you dare to go unsummoned into the presence of the Ruler of heaven and earth—the Lord of Hosts, who has forbidden man to toy with the life which He has given?"

"I am weary and heart-sick, good sir; and the tomb gives

a dreamless sleep."

"But the hereafter! Have you thought of that? the terrible hereafter! You are young and fair; your face is like the face of a child, why should you be weary of that life which you have just begun; and which strong men buffeted by a thousand storms, cling to tenaciously?"

"I am wretched and alone. Not a tie of kindred; not a soul on whom I have the slightest claim for care or protec-

tion! I have none to counsel me; none to advise!"

"If you will permit me to stand to you in a place of a brother, I will be all that a brother should!" said the young man gently—"but for comfort in this trial, through which you are evidently passing, you must look up to God, who alone can give peace to the troubled heart."

"I can not look up! I have no courage; no strength!"

"Strength will come in answer to prayer, my sister; and not death, but life is the season for offering the petition. Will you come back to it?"

His friendly hand drew her away from the icy brink of the river; the strange persuasiveness of his voice brought a reaction of feeling to her sore spirit. She saw with measureless terror the frightful doom from which he had saved her.

"I will go back!" she cried, earnestly—" I will shrink from

no evil! Only show me the way to light once more!"

It seemed that he knew her residence, for he led her on up the path to the cottage which she had quit but a brief hour before. The lamp still burned brightly; the fire blazed cheerfully on the hearth. He seated her in a chair before the grate, removed her shawl with thoughtful care, for it was wet with snow, and then took a seat, himself, on the opposite end of the hearth. During the space of silence which fell between these two so strangely brought together, Ruth had time to observe fully the face of her unknown guest.

This face was pale, its features finely, though delicately cut; the curve of the nostril indicated both firmness and courage,

but the mouth was tender and beautiful as a woman's. It was a face of spiritual strength and beauty—the face of one who had lived and suffered.

"You are Ruth Mowbray! I recognized you at once, from having seen you sometimes at church. And I am John

Rutherford, the pastor of Windfall."

She knew, now, to whom she owed her life—the young clergyman, whose burning eloquence, had won so many weary ones to rest their burdens at the foot of the Cross.

She arose, and held out her hand to him. From the full-

ness of her heart she spoke:

"Sir, you have saved my soul from death. For this I thank you. During the day and night which are gone I have been mad—but I trust the frenzy is over. Some time, to show you the truthfulness of my gratitude, and to prove to you that I had some cause for distress, I will confess to you what has never passed my lips. It will fill me with shame, yet I owe it to God for the sin I was about to commit against Him."

"Ruth, my sister, I ask of you no confidence which it is not your pleasure to give, but when you are saddened and oppressed, come to me freely, that I may share the weight of

the burden."

He looked into her eye with calm scrutiny—his hand was upon the latch, to go.

"You will be true to yourself-you will think of that terri-

ble self-destruction no more! I can trust you."

He smiled upon her hopefully, opened the door and passed out.

Ruth fell on her knees, and while thanking God that she had been taken from temptation, she prayed earnestly for that peace which passeth all understanding.

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CHAPTER VI.

MAPLEWOOD.

"The old, old sea; as one in tears, Comes murmuring with its foamy lips." READE.

Winifred's life at Maplewood was like that of many another proud, beautiful woman wedded to a man for whom no love is entertained. A fate the hardest and bitterest that can fall to the lot of woman! A home without love—a union but in name—a wretched farce to which death alone can draw down the curtain!

In all things, Winifred studied to obey her husband; his slightest wishes were her laws. She had said to herself that in expiation of her weakness in yielding to an unsought love, she would be to Mr. Winthrop a true, faithful, and obedient wife. She felt for him no affection, therefore she was cold and calm toward him, and his demeanor to her partook of the same haughty indifference.

Two years of this existence—it could scarcely be called life—and, outwardly, Winifred was unchanged, save that her loveliness had ripened and grown more perfect. Envied, admired, and flattered as she was, not an hour of happiness had she known since the doors of Atherton Hall had closed behind her, when she had gone forth a bride.

Winifred Winthrop's twentieth birthday approached; it arrived, at length. The air was fragrant with spring's sweetest blossoms, but there was no feasting nor joy at Maplewood. A night of wild doubt and anxiety, at times of dismay, drew on; but with the morning light came a happy consummation.

Mrs. Winthrop was the mother of a fine boy!

The father's delight was unspeakable. For the first time in his life a thrill warmer than admiration swept through his being for his wife, because she had brought him this great blessing.

A son to bear his proud name, to inherit his vast fortune, to

keep up the honor of his family!

Maplewood was thrown open to rejoicing. Laughter echoed around the lofty halls, lamps flashed, wine flowed, and in her darkened chamber languished the young wife; struggling with weakness—praying for life only that she might enjoy it with her precious child.

Who can fathom the depth of tenderness in the heart of a mother? Who can feel for that little helpless waif of humanity like her who has suffered to bring it into existence? Whose care is like hers, so gentle and tender? Who else on

earth loyes a little child but its mother?

It was strange to see how Winifred's proud heart softened and grew tender as an angel's toward that wee child. When she was able to rise from her bed, she would sit, for hours, gazing into its soft dark eyes, and twisting its silken hair about her fingers. The servants said that their mistress idolized the babe; and so it seemed, for never upon any account would she permit it to sleep away from her breast, and no amusement was powerful enough in its attraction to draw her from the care of her son.

Mr. Winthrop named the boy William, after its paternal grandfather, but Winifred shortened it to Willie-the word

had a sweeter sound, she said.

Strongly as she was attached to Willie, her love met with a full return. Before he was three months old, he had learned to love her sheltering arms above any other resting-place. He wailed piteously when taken away from her but for a moment; and when a year had passed over his bright head, and he had began to toddle carefully about from one thing to another, he would never quit the protecting clasp of her hand, or go to the arms of strangers. He seemed to shrink from his father, and would kiss no one save his mother, either for threats or persuasions.

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CHAPTER VII.

THE WORLD'S HONORS AND A SEASON'S MYSTERIES.

"From lofty hills and fertile vales,
From hut and palace halls,
From hamlet, town, and city's din,
The country's clarion calls!
And men go forth with swelling hearts,
To win an empty name—
They quaff their wine from golden cups,
And call the bubble, Fame."

Anonymous.

"O'er all these hung the shadow of a fear,
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted,
And said, as plain as whisper in the ear—
'The place is haunted!'"

HOOD.

MILFORD WINTHROP was the successful candidate. His name was enrolled among the honorables of his country; there was a seat in the senate hall, at Washington, waiting for his occupancy.

He was very proud of the result, won by his money more than by his worth, and he entered his wife's room with an elastic step. He was the bearer of important tidings, and he gave her them with an air of extreme satisfaction.

"Mrs. Winthrop, you are a senator's wife."

She bowed her head over her child, and simply said, in reply:

"Very well, Mr. Winthrop."

Three months spent in preparation, and then the newlyelected senator and his wife set out for Washington. Winifred had hoped to be left at home, but Mr. Winthrop was proud of her regal beauty, and this pride could only be gratified by the display of his treasure.

So to the gay capital went Mrs. Winthrop and her child.

An elegant mansion, on Madison Square, received them, in whose spacious drawing-rooms Mrs. Winthrop held receptions unequaled in brilliancy even by those of the President himself.

Thus passed the first winter and the succeeding summer.

The August heats were approaching, but Congress had not yet concluded its session. An unusual press of business still detained the august body at the metropolis; but most of the members' families had left town for some rural place of resort.

Winifred began to languish for the cool air of the country; and Mr. Winthrop proposed that she should spend a few weeks at Newport or the Virginia Springs. To this she objected; she wanted rest and quiet rather than a mere change of excitement: some retired place in the country would answer every purpose.

She had heard much of the fine natural scenery of Rappahannock county, and she desired to pass the remainder of the summer in some little village of that mountainous region.

At the mention of Rappahannock county, Mr. Winthrop

became strangely agitated.

"Madam, you will do me a favor by never again referring to this out-of-the-way place as a summer residence. The plan is abominable."

"Why should you object, sir, to a section of country justly celebrated for its salubrious airs and beautiful scenery? Since it meets my wishes, I hardly see what cause you have for interfering in the matter!" Winifred spoke coldly and haughtily—and he replied as coldly.

"I have sufficient cause. My son is to go with you, I presume; and it becomes me to see that he is carried to a proper place. As for my reasons for taking exception to Rappahan-

nock county, it is sufficient that I object!"

And for the time the subject dropped.

A few days afterward, Mr. Winthrop obtained leave of absence from congressional duties, and took a journey into the interior of Virginia. When he returned, he declared that his objections to Rappahannock county were entirely removed. Business, he said, had called him into that section, and he had found it all that could be desired for a temporary sojourn. So well had he been pleased, that he had engaged an old mansion a few miles beyond Warrenton—close to the Blue Ridge—and caused it to be fitted up for the reception of his wife and child.

"Bellemonte"-so the place was called, had been a fine old

estate, but the family to which it had belonged were mostly dead; and of late, Bellemonte had been sadly neglected.

Mr. Winthrop had secured a trusty negro and his wife to preside over the establishment; and this worthy couple, with Jack, the coachman, and Fanny, the cook, would comprise the kitchen household. Mrs. Winthrop might take with her as many attendants as she chose.

Winifred immediately commenced her preparations for leaving Washington. Two days afterward she set forth, Mr. Winthrop accompanying her as an escort; and Rosy, her own

maid, to attend to the personal wants of her mistress.

After seeing his wife safely installed at Bellemonte, Mr. Winthrop bade her farewell and returned to Washington.

Bellemonte was a wildly beautiful spot, in the near vicinity of the lofty hills known as the Blue Ridge. It was thickly wooded with fir-trees of a stunted growth; and half the plantation was covered with huge bowlders, which the spring floods from time to time had rolled down from the mountains.

The old mansion itself was dreary and weird enough for any tale of darkness that might be related of it. It was a house where men had lived and died; and one of our noblest poets says that all such are "haunted houses."

The rooms were low and dark from the creeping vines that covered the windows; the wainscots were black with age, and rotten and worm-eaten in many places. The chambers were mostly hung with tapestry, once wrought in beautiful patterns of gorgeous colors, by fair fingers now moldering perchance like their work; and the furniture-all of dark oak, must have belonged to another generation.

A large portion of the house was uninhabitable; but in the north wing, facing the mountains, three apartments, on the first floor, had been fitted up, not only comfortably, but luxu-

riously.

The sleeping-room of Winifred and her child was a cheerful, cosy place; its high, narrow windows commanded a bold view of the hills, and Winifred only regretted that the basement was at this point so very high as to preclude all idea of getting to the ground from the spacious balcony. She thought she would have liked to go out for her walks, from

this room, rather than be obliged to traverse the whole length of a gloomy corridor, amid the ruins, to reach the hall door.

Bellemonte was the property of a family by the name of Brandon, the only remaining member of which was far away. And this was all the information that Winifred could obtain by questioning Aunt Phillis, the colored housekeeper, who was remarkably taciturn for one of her class.

One apartment of the old house, rescued from the general decay by recent repairs, was a very Blue Beard's chamber of horrors to the fancy of Winifred. It was much like the other rooms in its vicinity, save that across the windows were strong iron bars; and the doors were secured with treble bolts upon the outside. There was no fireplace or other convenience for warmth, and the walls were covered with thick green baize.

"Phillis," said Mrs. Winthrop, seeking the old woman in the kitchen, "there is a room in close vicinity to mine that has

aroused my curiosity."

"'Deed, missus, dat's mighty cur'us," replied Phillis, giving the saucepan she was scouring a vigorous rub with her black hand.

"Can you tell me what it was used for? The room with the bolts on the outside of the door, and the walls covered with green flannel, I mean."

"Like enough it was de parlor."

"But the bars across the windows? and the lack of a fireplace, and the green cloth?" continued Winifred interrogatively.

"Bars to keep the owls out, and green good for bad eyes, I've hearn say. Seems to me, missus is mighty 'squisitive!"

And with this reasonable solution of the green-room mys-

tery, Winifred was obliged to content herself.

The days passed pleasantly enough at Bellemonte, save that the mistress had too much time for thought. She was alone once more; free to enjoy undisturbed the society of her darling child, now a beautiful boy of two years; but in spite of this sweet satisfaction, she found her thoughts constantly recurring to the pleasant evenings spent in the parlor of Atherton Hall with Gerard Middleton.

And, try as she would, those old memories could not be stifled; and when the anguish which they caused became too

great to bear, she would take little Willie in her arms and set out on a long ramble over the hills.

One August night, Mrs. Winthrop sat in her chamber trying to read; Willie slumbered in his crib by her side; Rosy was in bed in the adjoining room, and every thing around the house was hushed to the profoundest quiet.

It had been one of those sultry days peculiar to ripe summer, and the dull, torpid atmosphere was prolific of repose. Her book was uninteresting; the lamp burned dimly; a housefly droned lazily on the window; and Winifred, acted upon by surrounding influences, sank back in her chair and fell asleep.

She was awakened suddenly by some strange sound. The lamp had gone out, but the starlight streamed faintly into the room. Plainly discernible in the gloom of the place was a tall, gaunt figure, standing erect between this starlight and the window, from which the curtain was looped back. A human figure, with eyes like live coals, and long hair, white as snow, streaming around it like a shroud! This horrible shape advanced and leaned over the bed of little Willie; one skinny hand was extended, bearing aloft a glittering knife; the other held back the delicately-embroidered silk of the coverlet from the form of the innocent sleeper!

Winifred, with a fierce cry, leaped to her feet and confronted the strange visitant.

A wild, demoniac "Ha! ha! ha!" burst from the creature's lips, and simultaneously it melted away, as by some invisible agency, leaving the terror-stricken mother alone with her child.

Recovering herself by a powerful effort, Winifred searched the room with the strictest scrutiny. She left no nook nor corner unexamined—yet she discovered nothing. She looked to the doors and windows—they were securely fastened, and yet a guest had been admitted to her very bed-chamber.

It was not a dream; she was fully convinced of that. It was something real and tangible, but of what nature? She did not believe in supernatural appearances; she was not superstitious; and yet a cold, shuddering thrill ran through her as she held the babe to her breast.

She watched the night away, for she could not have slept

with that strange, inexplicable fear at her heart. She resolved to say nothing to any one of the occurrence; Rosy was exceedingly timid, and the negroes invariably kept one eye, at least, out for ghosts, and they would be afraid to remain in the house if they once got wind of the idea that the place was haunted; and she had no wish to be left alone. So she kept silent and watchful.

August was drawing to a close. The middle of September Mrs. Winthrop was to leave Bellemonte, and return to Maplewood, where she would remain until the winter session of Congress should usher in the gay season at Washington.

It was a bright summer day, and the unusual coolness of the air had invited to out-of-door exercise. Winifred had indulged herself in a very long walk, and being quite weary, she went to her bed earlier than was her custom. Willie had coaxed mamma to lie down beside him and tell him a story; and the simple tale finished, the two, mother and child, were locked in slumber.

Willie's head was nestled close to his mother's bosom, her bright, soft curls mingling with the brown rings that clustered around his full white forehead.

Winifred slept uneasily—a vague sense of insecurity had oppressed her all the day, and her slumber was troubled with wild dreams and distorted visions.

The touch of some cold substance upon her face awoke her. She knew not what this substance was, but it struck an icy chill to her heart. She lifted her hand to push it away, and that wild, unearthly "Ha! ha! ha! ha!" heard once before, burst on the air.

With a terrified cry Winifred sprang from the couch and peered into the gloom. The same demon face, with horrible blood-red eyes and snow-white hair, hovered above her! The same savage teeth, with the lips drawn tightly away from them, glittered before her!

Winifred bounded forward, and seizing the heavy bronze candlestick, hurled it at the intruder. The light was extinguished as the missile fell; there was a dull, dead sound as of the closing of a great door at some immeasurable distance—and then the silence of death fell upon the chamber.

Willie slept quietly in his bed, and Winifred stood alone in the center of the floor.

CHAPTER VII.

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THROUGH THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

"Yet, though thou wear'st the glory of the sky,
Wilt thou not keep the same beloved name?
The same fair form and gently-beaming eye?
Lovelier in heaven's sweet climate; yet the same!"

BRYANT.

It was a horrible mystery! Winifred longed, yet trembled, to fathom it. She hoped not to be obliged to ask for aid. She would rather encounter all the danger, if danger there was, and run all the risks.

Night followed night, and during the dark hours that determined woman never closed her eyes. What little rest she had was taken by day, when the household were astir, and Rosy awake to take charge of the child.

Winifred's father had but one brother, named George; and this George Atherton was one of the bravest and most daring men in the country. He had hardly earned the title of colonel, and though now an old man, he had always taken great delight in teaching his niece the use of warlike weapons. To please the old colonel, the girl had taken lessons in fencing, and was quite an adept in the use of firearms. In a sportive moment her father had presented her with a case of pistols, and these little desperate weapons had been for years in the false bottom of her trunk.

Now she took them out, loaded the barrels carefully, and placed them on the stand by her bedside, resolved that if she should be again favored with a visit from the mysterious fiend that had twice appeared to her, to try the effect of cold lead upon it.

But it did not seem likely that her courage would be tested. Time passed on monotonously, without variation, and but two nights more remained to Winifred at Bellemonte.

The intervening day must be spent in packing and making

other needful arrangements for traveling; and wearied and drowsy, Winifred threw herself upon the lounge, without un dressing, to catch a few moments' repose before the depth of the night should come. She knew that all her strength would be required for her labors of to-morrow.

She gave Rosy imperative orders to remain awake until she called her; and the girl, seated before the little fire, which the dampness of the night had made agreeable, with an entertaining novel in her hand, readily promised obedience.

Winifred soon fell asleep, for she was very weary, and she knew nothing more till she heard the hall-clock striking one.

She started up and put out her arm to clasp her child, but he was not by her side! His place was empty—he was gone! A wild shriek rose to her lips, but she stifled it instantly. Rosy must have taken him up, she said to herself, by way of assurance. She flew to the side of the girl—Rosy was sound asleep.

"Willie! where is -Willie?" demanded the distracted

mother, in a frenzy of suspense.

Rosy rubbed her eyes, and stared around her with a blank air.

"I have not seen him, madam," she said, "since I laid him down on the bed with you. As I hope for heaven, mistress, I have not!"

Oh! but those who called Mrs. Winthrop cold and passionless should have seen her then.

She roused the whole household instantly, and searched the mansion in mad haste. She went herself into the deepest recesses of the moldy, tomb-like cellars, and through the heavily-framed arches which supported the massive weight of the buildings.

Flambeaux were lighted, and the terrified negroes, led on by that resolute woman, searched every dell and dingle and ransacked every hovel in the vicinity. Slaves from the nearest plantations turned out and joined them, their quick sympathies awakened by the cry:

"The child of the Lady of Bellemonte has been stolen!"

All day the search went on; Winifred, pale, but firm, leading the van, and returning at nightfall only to see if her husband had arrived.

Mr. Winthrop had flown to the spot at the first alarm of the telegraph.

A more wildly, despairing man was never seen. His face was shrouded in a deathly pallor, his thin lips were rigid as those of a corpse, and his eyes seemed ready to start from their sockets. A couple of miles behind his horse had fallen dead under him, unable to endure the pace at which he was ridden; and the fresh animal that had been procured at Warrenton, was bathed in foam.

Mr. Winthrop grasped his wife rudely by the arm, and demanded the particulars of his son's loss. Coldly and briefly she revealed all to him—keeping nothing back.

He struck his forehead with his clenched hand.

"Great God!" he cried, madly, "it is as I thought. Oh, fool—fool that I was to consent to have my innocent child brought to the place where she drew breath! I might have known—but, O heaven, how fearfully am I punished!" He turned to the gaping negroes. "Saddle the fleetest horse in the stables! and you, Jack, get upon the other, and follow me over the mountains! I must reach Woodstock before day-break!"

Winifred would have accompanied the horsemen, but Mr. Winthrop thrust both her and her maid into a chamber, and locked the door upon them.

Who can imagine the feelings of the wretched mother while thus incarcerated!

The night wore on—a night of anguished suffering to Winifred Winthrop. She paced the narrow limits of her chamber unceasingly; throwing open the casement, and leaning far out into the darkness in the vain hope of hearing some sound indicative of the return of those gone in search of her child. No sound broke the stillness.

Rosy had sobbed herself to sleep on the floor; they two, were isolated from the other women of the establishment—confined and helpless; but Winifred never thought of fear. She would have braved ten thousand deaths, if the act could have restored to her her Willie.

At last the day broke open the eastern gates; the morning came, and the sun arose clear and smiling. Winifred took up her station at a window which commanded a view of the path

taken by Mr. Winthrop, and with fixed gaze she watched for the first indications of the return. She thought she perceived a dark, moving object, away on the very verge of the horizon -a mere speck-it grew larger-yes, there were two of them -two horsemen! They wound slowly down the mountainshe recognized them now; Mr. Winthrop bearing a bundle in his arms, carefully enveloped in a cloak, and the negro Jack following behind.

They were approaching the house; she could endure confinement no longer! Grasping the massy iron poker from the fender, she brought it to bear with all her strength against the door. Again and again the blow fell-the white oak quivered; the bolts held fast, but the hinges were old and rusty, and could not withstand the strain. They yielded; another frantic blow, they broke; the door flew open with a crash, and Winifred dashed out into the corridor and down the stairs.

She reached the outer door just as the equestrians rode up. Mr. Winthrop strove to avoid her, but she sprang upon him, and, with the strength of a giantess, tore the cloaked burden

from his arms.

The man seemed to be enraged by the action-all the fierce

passions of his nature leaped hotly into his face.

"Give him to me! Dead as he is, I claim him! He is mine-mine only!" he cried, savagely. "Was it not enough, madam, that you should insist on bringing him here to certain destruction? And now you would again take him from me!"

"Hush! I am his mother! And would to Heaven that none of your blood ran in his veins, as none of your inhuman

passions ever dwelt in his breast!"

Winifred was stung by her husband's harshness. All the high, proud temper of an Atherton was aroused. And he, enraged and embittered by the state of an awakened conscience, and rendered, by grief, but little better than a maniac, forgot his manhood, and struck her!

She staggered beneath the blow. For a moment her white face took the sanguinary hue of the red rose. But when she

spoke, her voice was calm and full.

"For this, I renounce all allegiance to the wretch I have

called husband! Henceforth I am a free woman!"

She turned slowly away, and bore the cold burden into

the house. Her heart had already told her what she might expect. With fearful composure, she uncovered the body of her child, and gazed upon the dead face. She kissed it tenderly—stroking the dark hair, and murmuring softly—

"Dear Willie! Dear little Willie!"

She asked Mr. Winthrop no questions concerning the night's adventures; but Jack told her all that he knew, in a few words.

Mr. Winthrop had ridden hard, and crossed the most elevated spur of the mountain a little below Front Royal, and had then pushed on rapidly until the Shenandoah river was reached.

He had intended to cross the stream, but it was swollen by recent rains, and it was difficult to find a ford. In searching for this, the body of little Willie was accidentally discovered. It lay close to the water, in the dark shadow of a clump of alders—the man said—and it was his master's opinion that it had died from strangulation. There was a dark circle around the delicate throat, and marks of human fingers deep and purple in the soft flesh! Also, around the place where the remains were found, there were prints of human footsteps in the wet sand, and some shreds of a woman's clothing adhered to a thorn-bush in the vicinity. And this was all that was known, and from such scanty information what inference was to be drawn?

Terrible suspicions touching Milford Winthrop, came to Winifred's ears from the neighboring people; the dark vail which covered his darker past life, was partially undrawn; and, what she saw and understood was enough to make her shrink with abhorrence from her husband; the man whom the world admired—the distinguished senator!

Winifred's great and overwhelming grief for her child swallowed up all lesser trouble, and for the seven days which followed his death, she walked like one in a trance.

Mechanically she prepared herself to leave Bellemonte; mechanically she suffered them to take her to Washington, and from thence to Maplewood.

Like one without life or feeling, she looked upon her boy in his coffin, and saw him laid in the grave, high above the moaning of the sea on the sandy shore. And when the sods were laid smoothly over his grave, and she had put her aching forehead to the cool turf to still its wild throbbings, she arose, and stood up alone, knowing that her duty here was ended!

CHAPTER IX.

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FINDING PEACE.

"Friend, thou must trust in Him who trod befor
The desolate paths of life;
Must bear in meekness, as He meekly bore,
Sorrow and toil and strife.
Trust then in Him, and yield not to despair!
Christ, in His heaven of heavens will hear thy prayer!"

From the German of Uhland.

The acquaintance so singularly begun between Ruth Mowbray and Mr. Rutherford, progressed steadily, until it ripened into perfect confidence.

In the young pastor, Ruth found a kind, and sympathizing friend; a tender brother. He encouraged her when she desponded—cheered her when she was sad—led her gently on to seek peace and rest upon the eternal arm of God's salvation! She went to his church—listened to his discourses, so searching, yet so full of love; and understood why his people almost worshiped him. He was poor in this world's goods, but rich in heavenly treasures. Here, he walked humbly with the lowly ones of earth; there, in the realms of glory, no angel would wear a brighter crown than he!

One evening, when she had known him for more than a year, Ruth revealed to this kind friend the little history of her life. She told him of her hopeless, unsought love; of her mad despair, and temptation—the rest, he already knew.

He comforted her as none other could have done; then, to show her that he fully appreciated her confidence, he gave her his own in return.

"I was born," he said, "in the great, bustling city of New Orleans, of parents who toiled for their daily bread. My father was a house-carpenter; my mother added something to our scanty income by fine needle-work. When I was about fif

teen, my poor father was fatally injured by the fall of a staging. I remember well my mother's despair when they brought him home, and the surgeon said that his days were numbered! He died the next day, in great agony. After the funeral expenses were paid, we found ourselves almost without a penny! My mother redoubled her exertions, and I was fortunate enough to secure a situation as clerk. I had, always by dint of much economy, been kept at school, and my education was uncommonly good for a lad of my age. Every leisure moment was devoted to study.

"Through the kindness of a schoolmaster, I was enabled to read many valuable works. Under his auspices I gained an acquaintance with the classics. At length, I became a teacher. The salary was better than that which I received from my present employers, and the labors more congenial. I accordingly entered upon the charge of the school. Here, again, I owed much to my good old friend. In all difficulties I went to him; and, whatever success crowned my efforts, I must attribute to his judicious advice. By degrees, I rose to be assistant-preceptor in a flourishing academy, in the State of North Carolina; and here I first met Catharine Hazelwood.

"That meeting was an era in my life. Miss Hazelwood was a New Englander, but having family connections in the South, she had come hither to finish her education, and at the came time to benefit her health. I can hardly convey to you a correct idea of this girl's exceeding beauty. She was one of the loveliest creatures I ever beheld. I think it was a case of love at first sight on my part; and I flattered myself that the fair girl was not wholly indifferent to me. She blushed at my approach—her hand trembled when it met mine in friendly greeting. If I had cause (with others of her class) to reprove her for badly learned lessons, her eyes would swim in tears.

"Catharine was the only daughter and heiress of a wealthy father, and, in consequence had been the belle of the quiet country village which she called home. Now, at school, her wealth and beauty were passports to favor, and she reigned a very queen. Sometimes I thought her proud and coquettish, but a single glance of her beautiful eyes disarmed all feelings but those of love, and I was more completely her slave than before. Strange it is that men, with all their boasted power

will be so blind, that the simplest school-girl can deceive the best of them!

"But I would not blame Catharine. She had been petted and flattered till the good in her nature was almost eradicated, and she was a most arrant coquette. She led me on to hope-my ardent devotion was very pleasant to her; and when, at length, I confessed all, and besought her to read my fate, she did not cast me utterly away. But I must wait, she said. She liked me-perhaps she loved me a little; but we were both young, and I was comparatively uneducated. She had set her heart, she said, on marrying a learned man, and I must oblige her by becoming this. A college course would improve me; when I had graduated with honor, she would give me a more definite answer. Inspired by hope, I taxed body and mind to the utmost. When twenty years of age, I entered the University at Chapel Hill, in advance. My dear mother sacrified many a sorely-needed comfort that my darling wish might be accomplished; and, as for myself, my life was bound up in the acquirement of knowledge. I wrote to Catharine many times-letters filled with fire and devotionand twice she wrote me in return. These letters were kept next my heart, and read and re-read scores of times a day. You will think me an enthusiast, dear Ruth, but I was little more than a boy then, and worshiped my mistress with a boy's passionate fervor.

"I spent two years at Chapel Hill; and then, with the laurels of that fine old institution fresh and green on my brow, I bade farewell to my mother, and set out for Middleburg, Catharine's home—to lay them at her feet. I did not reach Middleburg until after the shades of evening had fallen; but, weary as I was, I could not wait until morning to see Catharine. I sought out her father's house, a large and handsome building, in a quiet, aristocratic street. The mansion was lighted up as if for a festival. Colored lamps swung from the shrubbery in the gardens; and a score of elegant equipages were drawn up before the door. The great parlors were one flood of radiance; and I entered together with a fresh rein-

forcement of guests.

"And judge, if you can, of the emotions that filled my soul when standing hidden behind the silken window curtains, I

saw Catharine Hazelwood married to a man twice her years a man rich in lands and stocks—who had won her with his gilded offerings!

"I sought an interview with the bride, and charged her with her falsity in no measured terms. She laughed in my face. She hoped, she said, that I was not so shallow as to think any thing of that youthful flirtation. It had amused her finely in that dull old school-day life—she should have died of ennui, if it had not been for me, and she most heartily thanked me for the favor I had done her in helping her kill time. Now, she trusted I would ignore the past, and regard her simply as a very good friend.

"I went out from her presence a changed man. I had seen my infatuation; my glaring ideal stood before me robbed of the love which had clothed her in the perfection of womanliness! I no longer thrilled at the sound of her name. My passion had died a violent death, and I buried it, and placed upon its sepulchre the stone of indifference. Henceforth, I resolved to live for others rather than for myself. I took the armor of the most high God upon me, and His gospel into my mouth! In this service I found happiness—happiness such as the world is powerless to give—or take away! Peace, founded on the Rock of Everlasting Love!

"I brought my mother here to your pleasant New England, and here we have set up our humble home; and here I hope to spend the remainder of my days in content. I ask no higher destiny than that which awaits me as a minister of God's truth, and may He aid me to so exercise my one talent that good may be done unto my people!"

And this was John Rutherford's life history, and Ruth wept over his disappointment, and smiled over his victory.

After this mutual confidence, a strong attachment grew between Ruth Mowbray, and the young minister.

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CHAPTER X.

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THE MILLINER'S FORTUNE.

"In life can love be bought with gold?"
Are friendship's pleasures to be sold?"
DR. JOHNSON

RUTH Mowbray went often to the parsonage, and sat at the feet of the mild-browed woman whom John Rutherford called mother, and listened to the teaching that fell from her lips. Mrs. Rutherford was a gentle spirit, trusting all her hopes and wishes unreservedly in God's hands, complaining never of fate, and enduring trials and crosses with saintly patience. Would that there were more like her, that their holy example might lead many, now in doubt, to the true source of all happiness and everlasting safety!

And gradually the heart of Ruth Mowbray took up a new song. At first its notes were low and feeble, but gathering strength with the nurturing lapse of time, it widened and broadened until its mighty surges swept the master-chords of

her being into perfect harmony.

At the sound of one footstep she blushed and trembled; at the touch of one hand she was filled with strange bliss; one voice had power to banish all care and sorrow from her soul!

Typhus fever, of the most virulent kind, broke out in Windfall. Almost every house was a house of sickness, and perhaps of death. Whole families were swept away, and terror seized upon the whole population.

In this time of universal sorrow, Ruth Mowbray was a good angel. She ministered unceasingly at the bedside of the sick and dying, and many a desolate, suffering one was made comfortable by her kind care. No hand was softer than hers on

fortable by her kind care. Two hand was solder that the hot brow, and no footstep fell so noiselessly on the distracted ear.

Mr. Rutherford, also, visited the sick untiringly, and ad ministered to their necessities with his own hands; he comforted the living, and prayed for the repose of the dead.

As the cooler weather of autumn approached, the fever cases diminished, and the fearful mortality was abated. But there were still scores of the afflicted, and Ruth Mowbray's services as "watcher" were almost nightly called into requisition.

For two nights she had kept a vigil by the bed of an aged woman, and at daybreak closed her eyes in death, and now, on the third night, she was looking forward to the luxury of undisturbed repose. She retired early to her chamber, and without undressing lay down on the bed. But sleep, so much wished for, refused to come. In vain she covered her eyes with her hand, in vain she counted the ticking of the clock, and fancied herself on the verge of dream-land-she was wide awake as ever. She thought that perhaps the light of the stars shining through her window at the foot of her bed troubled her, and rising she let down the curtain. But no, sleep still held aloof. The clock struck one, and almost simultaneously with the sound, a dull red glare shone into the chamber. It was not the moon, for that had set long ago behind the western hills. Brighter and redder gleamed the light. Ruth sprang up and threw open the window. The whole vicinity was glowing like noonday, and the sky glowed red as blood.

The light was that of a burning building, and, from her station at the window, Ruth had no difficulty in discovering that the parsonage was on fire.

She flew down the stairs, and hurried through the fields that lay between her cottage and the churchyard. She thought perhaps she could aid in saving some of the furniture from destruction. To her surprise, she found not the usual crowd gathered to witness the conflagration, for every one who was not languishing on a bed of sickness, was thoroughly worn out with attendance on others; and at this hour of the night probably the entire neighborhood was wrapped in sleep.

The fire had not yet taken hold of the main building, but was confined to a back wing used as a store-house and kitchen. Ruth tried the front door, but it was fastened on the inside, and then she was sure that the inmates had not escaped.

With a shudder she remembered that Mr. Rutherford had not slept for four nights, and consequently, in the depth of his

weariness, the roar of the flames had failed to awaken him. And Mrs. Rutherford and the servant-girl, where were they? Undoubtedly in the burning house, and unless speedily aroused, doomed to a fearful and inevitable death.

The flames had made rapid headway, and were now seizing on the roof of the principal building. A few moments more, and it would be too late! Some of the neighbors had now arrived, and eagerly the cry for Mr. Rutherford and his family run around the circle. For reply, Ruth pointed to the house.

A murmur of dismay broke on the air, for all saw the hopelessness of finding any one with sufficient courage to dare

the entrance of that blazing building.

"Not escaped! Good God! then they must perish!" cried a white-haired old man. "No human being could live long in such a smoke as that!" he pointed to the roof from whence a volley of smoke was issuing.

"I must go for them," said Ruth. "I can not stand by

and see them perish!"

A score of arms were raised to stay her course, but she sprang clear of them all, and dashing open the low window leading into the little sitting-room, she stepped inside. The apartment, though untouched by the fire, was filled with the stifling stench of smoke, and the crackling of the flames in the next room would have dismayed any heart not nerved with superior courage. Up the broad stairs flew the daring girl, and along the corridor to the chamber door of Mrs. Rutherford. The portal was thrown open from within, and the old lady, pale but calm, met her on the threshold.

"Your son? where is he?" Ruth asked the question quickly,

impatient of a second's delay.

"Yonder! I was going to call him;" she indicated a distant door, where the flames were sweeping down hotly from the ceiling, and the red cinders fell in a thick cloud.

Ruth bounded along the passage, and flung open the door of the chamber. The fire scorched her hair, and the heat of

the floor burned her feet, but she did not hesitate.

Mr. Rutherford lay on the bed, wrapped in a dressing-gown and sleeping quietly as an infant, all unmindful of the peri: which surrounded him.

Ruth grasped his shoulder, and shook him violently.

"Wake up! Wake up!" she cried. "Follow me! the house is on fire!"

He sprang to his feet, and gazed around him with blank amazement.

"You here, dear Ruth! Leave me instantly! I will come -but stay, where is my mother and Katharine?"

"Your mother is in safety by this time, but Katharine-I

had forgotten her."

"Go, then, this moment! I will arouse the girl. Go,

dear one, and God keep you!"

They left the room together, and together they met the fiery billow of flame that surged down to meet them. Grasping Ruth's hand firmly in his own, the young minister hurried on to the chamber where the servant-girl slept. He pushed open the door-Katharine lay in a swoon in the center of the floor—the fright had been too much for her. Rutherford raised her up.

"Go before me down the stairs, Ruth," he said; "I must

save this poor creature, at all hazards."

The trembling girl obeyed him, and they made the descent in safety. But not a moment too soon! With a loud crash, the stairway fell in, and the burning rafters of the roof covered their retreat with a sea of fire.

The outer air was reached at last, and scorched and faint, Ruth Mowbray sank down at the feet of Mrs. Rutherford.

A moment more, and the once pleasant parsonage lay upon the ground, a heap of blazing timbers, and a pyre of crimson light!

The houseless family went home with Ruth, where they remained until mid-winter, when a new home was made ready for them on the site of the old one.

And not long after their removal, John Rutherford, sitting by the side of his fair preserver, asked her to put her hand in his, and walk with him through life. Her head sank to rest on his shoulder-she was glad to lay it there; and she did not resist the gentle arm that drew her close to his strong, true heart.

his only sisters consequently, to her child, an next of hin

descended the property of the Carls-amounting to debute

thousand pounds sterling; together with the title of Lady

CHAPTER XI.

MY LADY.

"Gentle, and lovely, and high-born was she-"

ALANSON.

its sole proprietress.

THE pastor of Windfall was standing before his cottage door, when a Boston coach stopped at the gate, and a stranger inquired if Ruth Mowbray resided in the neighborhood.

"Ruth Mowbray? yes, sir-yonder is her home."

"Thank you, sir; and if you are a friend of hers, you will rejoice at hearing of her good fortune. Ruth Mowbray is Ruth Mowbray no longer, but Lady Ruth Manchester, the heiress of one of the finest estates in England. To communicate this intelligence I am seeking her. Good morning, sir."

Ruth Mowbray no longer! but Lady Ruth Manchester! Mr. Rutherford said the words over again and again, as a deep shade of sadness settled on his usually placid brow. A titled heiress! what would she care for the love of a poor and humble clergyman? would she renounce the pomp and pageantry which awaited her beyond the sea, to share his lowly lot, and reign in his lowly heart?

In spite of faith, doubt came upon him. He entered his chamber; closed and locked the door, and on his knees supplicated for strength to bear whatever might be in store for

him.

"She was always beautiful—now, she is rich and titled—yet why should I murmur? If this blackness of desolation should fall on my life, I can only cling closer to the God of goodness, who never willingly afflicts. I will trust!"

He felt soothed and strengthened; and, believing that all would be ordered for the best, he went cheerfully about his daily duties. His mother saw the struggle in his feelings, but she forbore her sympathy—save by the prayers which she sent to Heaven, that this cup might pass from him.

Of course Windfall was alive with the news. Lord Henry Dorset had died without heirs; and Mrs. Mowbray had been

his only sister; consequently, to her child, as next of kin descended the property of the Earl—amounting to eighty thousand pounds sterling; together with the title of Lady Manchester.

There was a younger niece of the dead peer, who came in for a small annuity; for the rest, the quiet little dress-maker was its sole proprietress.

Mr. Montague, the agent of the late Lord Dorset, had come to convey the intelligence, and to accompany the young heiress to England.

It was really astonishing to see how quickly people discovered the extraordinary virtues and graces of Ruth Mowbray. Her cottage was flocked with aristocratic visitors; each and all anxious to pay their respects to and congratulate Lady Manchester on her accession to her rightful honors. Presents were sent her by young ladies, who had hitherto treated her with contempt.

To no one did Ruth see fit to give her confidence. Windfall, with all its gossips, could not ascertain whether she intended to remove to England, and assume her rights and honors, or whether she would remain where she was-content with being the queen of the village. Great anxiety was felt on this score; envious maidens heartily wished her beyond the Atlantic; for their particular favorites among the young men had suddenly become aware of the fact that Ruth was the fairest and most winning damsel in the village; and how it would all end none knew. Mr. Montague, the agent, had quarters in Boston, and when questioned regarding Lady Manchester's intentions was particularly close-mouthed on the subject. Curiosity, for once, was baffled. As for John Rutherford, he held aloof. He would not influence the girl, he said; he would not hold her unwillingly to her engagement with him, though his heart should break in giving her liberty. Four days rolled by, and still there came to him no message from the young heiress; and rumor said that on the fifth she would sail for England. Rutherford, stern and unmoved, heard the tidings, and still went not near her.

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CHAPTER XII.

She had fixed on South-Carellina as her place of refuge.

THE BREAD OF LABOR.

"There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough hew them as we will."

SHAKSPEARE.

we must now, for a time at least, degreeni MRS. WINTHROP had heard enough, vague though it was, to make her shudder at the very thought of remaining another day with the man whom the law had made her husband.

Willie was dead-the only link that bound her to Mr. Winthrop was severed; and now that she knew Milford Winthrop to be the vilest thing on earth, she was resolved to endure her martyrdom no longer.

She breathed not a word of what she had heard; she made her preparations with silence and dispatch. Her trunks were yet in the depot at Boston; and she had only to arrange the deep mourning dress which she proposed to wear henceforth.

Her jewels, to the value of several thousand dollars, she sealed up and forwarded to an old and tried friend of her father's in Roxbury, with instructions to keep them until she should reclaim them.

She had by her about one thousand dollars, and with this she thought to go South and establish a school for young ladies. Her property she still held in her own right, and there was no necessity of her laboring for a living; but employment for the mind she must have. Sad reflections overpowered her when she sat down to idleness, and she had heard it said that the bread which is bought by toil is sweet.

She passed the night—the dim, misty night—upon the grave of her child: it was the last tribute she could pay. Early in the morning she arose from the chill turf, and bade this tomb of her love a long farewell. Two hours later she was in Boston. Reclaiming her trunks, she changed their labels, and as the property of Mrs. Lucy Bell, they were put on the train for

New York. She followed them, and that night she slept in the great metropolis.

Mr. Winthrop was absent on business, and would not discover her flight until pursuit would be useless, for she had

left no clue by which she might be traced.

She had fixed on South Carolina as her place of refuge. She would be least likely to be sought in that direction, and would be by no means likely to meet any one from the North in that State, who had known her in happier days. Besides, she had heard much in praise of the genial climate of the

Carolinas, and her health was none of the strongest.

Mrs. Bell,—as we must now, for a time at least, denominate Winifred,—hurried on from New York to Charleston, by the steamer. The voyage was unusually long, and the weather boisterous; but at last the spires of Charleston burst into view, and the steamer drew up to the crowded wharf. The busy, bustling scene of confusion for a moment made Mrs. Bell's head turn giddy; she was unused to making her way through such a multitude alone and unprotected; but gathering strength from her very weakness, she stepped on shore and gave her baggage into the guardianship of an officious hackman. He inquired whither she would be driven—she said to some quiet, respectable hotel.

Arrived at an unpretending house in a retired street, the coachman handed her out, and demanded two dollars for his fee. She put her hand in her pocket for her purse—it was not there! In the crowd at the quay she had been robbed!

She explained the matter to the man, who immediately immediately changed his respectful air to the most insolent abuse, which he delivered in broken English and bad French.

"Madam can say what she likes-n'importe! I sall have

de l'argent, ou je ne donnez-vous pas vos coffres!"

"Very well," she returned; "you can retain the trunks; no doubt but you will find in them amply sufficient to pay you for your trouble."

"Madam is one trompeur; I no sall have no tricks played on me!"

She drew from her finger a ring of exquisite workmanship, set with a single topaz.

"Take this and give me my trunks. Take it; it would purchase your whole establishment!"

"Non! Non! Pierre Le Couvre is no fool. He has seen tout le monde. You is one sheat, I does tink!"

"And I think a wholesome coup de pied à derrièro would benefit you, and teach you a lesson," cried a young man who had paused near and listened to the colloquy—" so there—"

He flung the little Frenchman a two-dollar note, and at the same time gave him a kick which set him tumbling down the steps into the gutter—muttering as he went—"

"Sac-r-r-r-e!" with a true Gallic roll of the r.

The young man turned to Mrs. Bell.

"Madam in what manner can I serve you?" he asked, courteously.

He had removed his hat, leaving his forehead bare. She looked attentively into his face, and saw nothing there but

manly truth and nobility.

"Sir," said she, "I thank you for the service you have already done me. I am a Northerner, desirous of getting employment as a teacher. I had thought of a school in a small way, but, as some one has abstracted my funds, I shall be content—nay glad—of a place as governess in some private family."

A flush of intelligence passed over the young man's features. He took a few moments for consideration. At length he said—

"I came to this place partly to procure an instructress for my young sisters, whom my mother is unwilling to send away from home; I have been disappointed in the person I had expected to engage; but I hardly regret it, if we can make a

bargain to put you in her place."

Mr. Vernon—so the stranger introduced himself—conducted the lady into a parlor of the hetel, and a regular business interview took place between them. The result was favorable to both. Mrs. Bell was engaged at a liberal salary; and before noon of that day she was on her way with her employer to his plantation—"Castle Hill"—several miles above Columbia, on the Wateree river.

At sunset of the third day the travelers reached their destination, and Mrs. Bell was at once made one of the family.

The master of the place was her kind acquaintance of three days—Horace Vernon, whom the early death of his father had left in charge of the family and estates. Mrs. Vernon was still

young, handsome, and thrifty—a fair type of a southern house-wife. There were two little fair-haired girls—Horace's sisters—Alice and Mildred; and when the governess saw them, the memory of her own darling, lying dead and cold in his seaside grave, came over her, and bursting into tears she left the room.

Mrs. Vernon understood at once that some great grief troubled the heart of the stranger, and with true delicacy she forbore to question her. Mrs. Bell would do best without that sympathy which must seem obtrusive, she said; and so she evinced no curiosity, but treated the governess with a kind, motherly attention, very pleasant to the recipient.

Mrs. Bell's life at Castle Hill was calm and pleasant. Mrs. Vernon was like a dear mother to her; and the children loved her so dearly that they were ever ready to render the most implicit obedience to her wishes. Every night when she knelt in prayer, she thanked God that He had cast her lines in such pleasant places.

The Vernon's had taken it for granted that their governess was a widow, and she was willing that the illusion should continue. She never alluded, in any manner, to her past life; and they came to suppose that she had married unhappily, and perhaps against the wishes of her friends, and therefore avoided the theme.

CHAPTER XIII.

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AN UNEXPECTED JOURNEY AND UNEXPECTED EVENTS.

"Love! I scorn the word! I know it not!
I listen only to the voice that bids me on!
On, whether I will, or no; the stern, cold voice
Of duty!"

Our heroine had been at Castle Hill fifteen months, and never a word of Mr. Winthrop had reached her, save occasional allusions in the newspapers to his career at Washington.

She was sitting at her sewing, in the parlor, one cold morning in February, when Horace Vernon came in with the week's mail. While he was examining his letters, she took up the brown bundles he had thrown into her lap— the family news.

papers—and tore off the wrapper of the first one that offered. Glancing listlessly over the damp sheet, her eye was caught by the following paragraph.

"TERRIBLE AFFAIR AT THE CAPITAL!

"We learn from the Washington Globe of the 30th ult., that a duel has taken place between Senator Winthrop, of Massachusetts, and Brandon Lawrence, Esq., of Virginia, which resulted in serious, if not fatal injury to the former. It is thought by the attending physicians that Mr. Winthrop will not survive his wounds, though he may, possibly, live for some weeks longer. He has been removed from his hotel to a private house in Alexandria, where he will be carefully attended to. It is said that the meeting between the two gentlemen was caused by some family affairs, which have not yet transpired, and with which we, at present, are not conversant."

There followed a long tirade against the practice of duelling; a bitter editorial on the magnitude of that man's crime who stands up coolly to shoot down his fellow-man—but Mrs. Bell read no further. She put down the paper, and left the room. Up to her chamber she went, and passed an hour in silent, though troubled thought. At the end of that time, she

arose-her course of action was determined upon.

The path of duty lay clear and plain before her! The man whom she had promised to honor, obey, and cherish, in sickness as well as in health; lay, perhaps, at the point of death, with no kindred hand to smooth his pillow, or wipe the clammy sweats from his brow. He was stricken down in his manhood—stricken by his own graceless act—the victim of a false code of honor—the outcast of good men—the companion of the blood stained. She felt no regard for Milford Winthrop; yet she would go to him, now, in his dire extremity!

She hastily packed a few articles of necessary clothing in a basket; attired herself for traveling, and descended to the parlor, where Mrs. Vernon and her son were sitting. Her hand trembled as she entered the presence of those good friends, for a moment she was tempted to throw herself on their friendship and give them her entire confidence, but she resisted the impulse, and in a few brief words informed them that a circumstance had occurred which rendered it necessary for her to go north for a while. She regretted, she said, while she

could not obviate the necessity; and would, if Providence permitted, return to Castle Hill, and fulfil her engagement. Mrs. Vernon was surprised and pained. It was so sudden—could not Mrs. Bell defer the journey for a few days? No, the governess said—every moment's delay was an agony to her; she must set off immediately.

Well, Mrs. Vernon said, if she must leave them, she could only speed her on her way by placing no obstacles before her, and by wishing her a prosperous journey, and an early return. Horace said nothing, though his handsome face clouded at the announcement of his favorite's intended departure, and when

she left the room, he followed her out into the hall.

"Must you go, Lucy? Cannot you write, or send some one in your stead?" he asked, anxiously.

"I, only, can attend to this call, Mr. Vernon. It is a duty

-a sacred duty!"

"May I inquire how far north this business will take you?"
She hesitated, but at length replied—"Some distance north of Richmond, in Virginia."

"So far! and you think to go alone? It must not be! I

object to it, most decidedly!"

"Thank you for your interest—but there is no need of apprehension. I shall be entirely safe, and—"

"Mrs. Bell, "he said, with decision, "you have been under my roof nearly fifteen months, and have I ever in that time given you reason to doubt me?"

"No! never!" she returned, warmly.

"Well, then, I am going to accompany you a part of your way; you, yourself, shall set the limit if it be a reasonable one. I do not wish to pry into your affairs; I do not seek to know what calls you away from us—I trust you in that, for you can do no evil! But you shall not undertake all that long journey alone! So, consider it settled that I am to go with you."

She was in too much haste to set out, to argue with him, and so he had it all his own way. Mrs. Vernon approved her son's plan heartily; kissed both the travelers cordially; wished them God speed, and sent them away. Two days' constant traveling by rail, brought them within the borders of Virginia, and here, Mrs. Bell entreated her escort to leave her. But he refused, and they went on together to Fredericksburg. She

would permit him to go no farther, and Horace seeing her evident distress at his persistance, forbore to urge his company upon her.

The next day, Mrs. Bell reached Washington City, and at early twilight, she stood beside the bed of Milford Winthrop.

Mr. Winthrop's greeting to his wife partook of shame, surprise, and pleasure. His intense suffering required the constant care of a nurse, and there was no hand so soft as Winifred's; no voice so sweet and soothing. All other attendants were dismissed from his chamber, and his wife took the sole charge-he was grateful and penitent. If she quitted his presence, only for a moment, he was restless and uneasy until her return. Moreover, he wished to confess to some one the many sins that lay in such a burden on his conscience; and to whom could he humble himself so well as to his muchwronged wife? He knew that the sands of his life were falling away-in a little while the glass would be empty; and, in view of the great change that was coming upon him, Milford Winthrop grew humble and remorseful. Winifred tended him with the utmost patience and gentleness. She hated him no longer; his very helplessness disarmed all feelings but those of compassion. At intervals, as his distress would permit, Mr. Winthrop made Winifred acquainted with the history of his life. The details were given in broken sentences, and in parts accompanied with bitter repinings; so we connect, and condense the essential portions of his relation, for the convenience of the reader.

Milford Winthrop was born in the State of New York, of wealthy parents, and early destined by his proud father for the bar. He was an only son, and the probable heir of a large fortune. At the age of nineteen, he came forth from the halls of New Haven university, a graduate; but, before he commenced the study of his profession, he indulged in two years of travel. He visited the principal points of interest in Europe; returned, a gay, dissolute young aristocrat, to the States, and set off on a Southern tour. At college, he had become very intimate with a young Virginian, named Brandon Lawrence, and by invitation of his friend, his visit South was made. Lawrence resided in the western part of the Old Dominion, on a fine swell of land, which rose higher and higher

at the north until it joined the Blue Ridge. It was a capital place for hunting and fishing, and Lawrence being an orphan, with no relatives in the house, save a maiden aunt who had the supervision of the servants; there was nothing to hinder the young men from enjoying themselves continually in outof-door sports. Milford, as we have said, was rather a wild youth, and this kind of life suited him exactly. Lawrence, was a noble-hearted young fellow, with a fine flow of spirits, and willing to do any thing to promote the enjoyment of his guest. If your our sid bon redminds and mon

But a change came, and the confrères were obliged to quit their pioneer sort of life. Lawrence's cousin, Melicent Brandon, a fair, beautiful girl of seventeen, came for a visit to her aunt and cousin. Unlucky hour! Besides her personal attractions, Melicent was possessed of some fortune. She was the promised bride of young Lawrence. He loved her truly and tenderly, with the whole strength of his fervid, Southern nature, and she professed to return his affection. But the handsome face of Mr. Winthrop, and his stylish, fascinating manners, attracted the somewhat coquettish girl, and she grew cold and distant toward her cousin. Winthrop was not slow to follow up his advantage. Melicent was handsome, of an old family, and she was an heiress; he admired her beauty, coveted her fortune. He basely betrayed the confidence of his friend; proposed an elopement to the giddy girl-and thus consummated his villainy. The erring couple left the house at night; proceeded to a small village some six miles distant, where they were united, and returned to the mansion of the outraged lover before breakfast.

As a matter of course, they were indifferently received. The bride was sent home to her parents at Bellemonte; and young Lawrence and the bridegroom met in a duel, which resulted in a wound to the former, that kept him confined to his bed for two months. The parents of Melicent were almost heart-broken at the conduct of their daughter. Melicent had been their idol-the shrine about which the tenderest affections of their hearts clung, and the rendering of the chords of confidence and love was very bitter. The match between her and her cousin had been long settled, and this rude sundering of the engagement brought reproach and scandal upon

the hitherto unsullied name of Brandon. Winthrop cared nothing for this; his very recklessness increased the distress of the aged parents of his wife. Mr. Brandon fell into a decline. His naturally feeble constitution was broken by the recent stroke—ere long death released him. His wife, completely prostrated by the loss of her husband, sank into a rapid consumption, and survived him only a few short months. Thus the whole Brandon property fell into the hands of Milford Winthrop. As for Mr. Lawrence, immediately on his recovery from his wound, he sold his Virginian possessions, discharged his liabilities, and, broken in health, spirits, and fortune, left the country. Whither he went no one knew.

Young Winthrop, by this time, wearied of his pretty, capricious wife; and her wild grief for the loss of her parents, mingled as it was with bitter self-reproach, filled him with intense dissatisfaction. He hated to see a woman forever in tears, he said; he wanted a wife to cheer him and make him happy, not a blubbering Niobe. In consequence, poor Melicent was treated with harshness, often with cruelty. This conduct of her husband was not without its effect on the wretched girl. Her mind, never of the strongest type, became filled with one idea, upon which she dwelt day and nighthatred for Milford Winthrop. Her love had undergone a gradual but sure transformation; and now she abhorred him as cordially as she had once loved. This hatred with her took the form of a fearful monomania. She imagined that if she could deprive her husband of life, she would be doing the world an immeasurable service; and thrice had she made attempts to murder him. He placed her in close confinement, and allowed no one to visit her room but himself. He seemed to take a sort of fiendish delight in her helplessness, and in taunting her with her impotence to do him harm. But he was not so secure from her as he thought. He awoke one night to find her standing over him with a huge butcher-knife, just ready to strike it to his heart. He dashed it aside, and succeeded in capturing her, but not until she had wounded him severely with a pair of scissors which were fastened to her girdle,

After this occurrence, Winthrop felt himself justified in deserting her. However, he did not leave her alone. He

placed her in the care of a servant after his own heart, and himself set out for the East, where he readily obtained a decree of divorce from his wife, on the ground of her insanity. By the decree he was appointed guardian of the unfortunate woman. The property, of course, saving enough for her maintenance, belonged to him according to the statute provided for such cases. After obtaining the divorce, he returned to Bellemonte, disposed of all the Brandon heritage (except the old homestead), including lands, stocks, and slaves.

His father's death, occurring about this time, put him in possession of a princely revenue; and soon after, having studied law at each leisure moment since his departure from college, he commenced the practice of his profession in Boston. Occasionally he visited Virginia to see that his wretched victim was not let loose. With the lapse of years, Melicent's malady increased, and she became periodically insane in reality. Still, she had lucid intervals in which her cries for release were heart-rending. Mr. Winthrop had been in business several years when he first met Winifred Atherton. The girl's beauty pleased him, and her father's wealth was agreeable to his inordinate love of gold. By a crafty appearance of virtue, and many a well-timed act of kindness, he led the unsuspecting old man to place in him unlimited confidence. The result of this scheming is already known. When Mrs. Winthrop had wished to leave Washington for some country retreat, and by a singular coincidence, had fixed on Rappahannock county—the scene of her husband's villainy—he had opposed her plan, because she would be brought into the vicinity of his first wife's prison-house. But, on second thought, he feared to persist in his objections, lest Winifred should suspect him of some hidden motive, and institute investigations which might lead to an expose of the whole affair.

Therefore he had made a journey into western Virginia, and removed Melicent to an old hunting-lodge on the other side of the mountains, some three or four miles from Woodstock. There he left her in care of two of his younger slaves, giving them strict directions not to allow her to quit her room on the peril of their lives.

Melicent was possessed of exceeding artfulness and no small degree of craft. The negroes, believing her too thoroughly

insane to heed or comprehend their conversation, had no scruple in discussing freely their master's affairs in her presence, and through their idle gossip she learned the whole particulars of the expected arrival at Bellemonte, and the preparations which were making. With infinite joy she found that the chamber which was to be appropriated to Mrs. Winthrop was the room which Mr. Brandon, her late father, had used for a cabinet; and behind the chimney of which there was a sliding panel, close down to the floor, that shut up a roomy recess, used by the former master of Bellemonte as a sort of safe for papers of value. This recess communicated with a narrow passage leading under the north wing of the mansion, and terminating in an outlet in the open air, which was closed by a movable stone. Melicent knew this secret, but she had never divulged it to any one; and when she understood that the wife and child of her enemy were to be domiciled in that chamber, she swore in her soul a terrible oath to take the lives of both.

It was night, but she knew the way well. Like a wild deer she flew on, and reached the mouth of the secret passage without molestation. The great stone gave her ready ingress to the passage. She ascended to the recess, and, removing the sliding panel, gained Winifred's chamber. Mother and child were both sleeping, and both would have fallen sacrifice to the rage of the demon, but for Winifred's sudden and providential awakening. Once again, on a succeeding night, was her design frustrated in the same manner. The third time she had been partially successful. The presence of Rosy had prevented her from murdering the mistress. So she contented herself with stealing little Willie. The child she proposed to carry to the lodge, and kill it at her leisure; but the poor innocent's cries for its mother were so piteous, and its struggling rendered it such a burden, that her patience gave out. She strangled it, and left it dead on the banks of the river. The extraordinary exertions which she had made, and the exposure that she had undergone, threw the miserable woman into a raging fever, which lasted three weeks. At the expiration of that time, her disease took a favorable turn, and for more than a month it was expected that she would ultimately recover. But a relapse occurred, and her fate was decided. Mr. Winthrop arrived at the lodge the day preceding her death; and his threats wrung from the dying woman a minute confession of her sin. She revealed all, unreservedly; and with the last word trembling on his lips, she expired. Mr. Winthrop saw her decently interred by the side of her parents; gave the negroes, who had served him so faithfully, their freedom, shut up Bellemonte, and returned to Maplewood to find his home desolate.

Three weeks before the fatal duel, Brandon Lawrence, the cousin of Melicent, had arrived in America. An accidental meeting had taken place at Washington between the former friends, and some taunting words were exchanged. Mr. Lawrence's hot blood was in no wise cooled by the lapse of time. He challenged Mr. Winthrop to mortal combat. This was the substance of his confession. Winnifred could only compassionate the poor, wasted piece of mortality before her, and commit him, with many prayers, to the mercy of God. Mr. Winthrop grew worse. His wounds healed falsely—inflammation set in, and for six miserable days he suffered unspeakable agony. With vain longings for a little more of the fever called life, and clinging closely to the hand of his wife as though she could keep him back, the spirit of Milford Winthrop passed unto the bar of its Judge.

CHAPTER XIV.

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THE PAINS OF SICKNESS.

"Though griefs unnumber'd throng thee round,
Still in thy God confide!
Whose finger marks the seas their bound
And curbs the headlong tide."

MERRICK

One bright April morning, she set forth on her return to Castle Hill. It was the middle of the month when she reached Columbia—wet, rainy, and extremely muddy. She took a stage coach to a little village some ten miles from Castle Hill, and owing to the wretched state of the roads, washed by recent heavy rains, her progress was exceedingly slow. There was

a poor woman, with a blue-eyed little girl, passenger in the coach, and the child seemed suffering with some unknown disease. Winifred, compassionating the stranger, sought her acquaintance, and divided with her the task of holding the child. The mother thought it had the measles, as it had been exposed to them, and the skin had something of that appearance. About half-way to the village before-mentioned, the woman and child left the coach, the latter being unable to ride farther. Winifred performed the remainder of the journey alone. Arrived at the terminus of her stage journey, she engaged a private conveyance to Castle Hill. During the last few days, a strange languor of spirits, and lassitude of body, had oppressed her; and now her temples throbbed hotly with a raging headache. The jolting of the carriage increased the pain almost beyond endurance, and she feared that her strength would not sustain her through the transit. She became incredibly anxious to get on-the horses went at a snail's pace, and the bold swell of Castle Hill was so long in breaking on her view. From the parlor windows Horace Vernon saw the approaching carriage. He hurried out. Winifred had just strength enough to murmur:

"Take me to the house!" when she fell back unconscious,

for the first time in her life.

Horace tore open the carriage-door, and, clasping the inanimate form in his arms, bore her into the parlor, and laid her down on a sofa by the fire. With all haste he dispatched a servant for a physician. In a brief space Dr. Uphan arrived. He examined the patient critically, made some singular inquiries, and shook his head.

"She has the small-pox, of the most virulent type, I should judge by the fever. I have seldom felt so high a pulse. She

has a hard three weeks' work before her-poor girl!"

Horace Vernon's decision led him to act quickly. He called his mother, gathered together his servants, and bade them prepare for an immediate journey. In two hours' time the entire household (with the exception of Horace and an old negress who had had the disease) were on their way to a small plantation seven miles up the river. Horace Vernon never felt a more intense thrill of satisfaction than at the moment he knew that Winifred was to be his charge; that to

him she was to owe all the careful tenderness that a sick per-

son requires.

When all danger from contagion was over, Mrs. Vernon and the family came back to Castle Hill, and Winifred was in great danger of being tended to death. As soon as Winifred was strong enough to talk, she confided her whole history to these excellent friends, keeping back only the portion relating to Gerard Middleton. That she could not bring herself to reveal. To the surprise and infinite distress of her friends, Winifred's sense of vision continued to grow less and less, until, in a few weeks, total blindness came upon her. Physicians without number were consulted; they all prophesied that return to health would restore the power of sight; but time passed and brought no favorable issue. It was a terrible trial to this proud, beautiful woman; but, in passing through the deep waters of affliction, she learned to put faith in the goodness of a gracious God. Her very helplessness endeared her to Horace Vernon. It was his privilege to bear her about in his arms, paint to her blinded vision the glory of the summer landscape, to soothe and comfort her as a mother does . her well-beloved child.

But what of those other lovers whose fortunes we have

thrust upon our readers?

The heart of the young pastor of Windfall grew heavy within him. His love as well as his inclination said to him: "Go to Ruth Mowbray, tell her how strongly and tenderly you love her! Tell her that without her, life will be worse than a blank. Confess all to her, and perhaps her affection will be stronger than her pride." But was it pride on the other hand that said? "No; remain where you are. Let her choose for herself. You do not wish to take for a wife one who has a single thought or feeling reaching out after other shrines. Wait."

It was a beautiful September evening—the universal heart of nature was at peace. But there was one who took no rest. Back and forth in the shrubbery behind the church, walked John Rutherford; his face pale and stormy; his arms folded in the semblance of resignation upon a breast whose wild beating proclaimed no resignation within. It was near mid-

night, he knew, for the clock on the neighboring steeple had just given the warning. He had hoped against hope for some message from little Ruth. The hope was dead now,

and in its place had come despair.

It was midnight—the last night that the fair girl would spend in her native land. So report said, and why should he hesitate to believe it? Only a few more brief hours, and they would be irrevocably separated. The thought was maddening. He turned to enter the house, where he might spend his night of sorrow alone. A hand was laid lightly on his arm. He stood face to face with Ruth Mowbray. The white moonlight shone full upon her brow; her deep, earnest eyes were lifted to his. There was no guile, no shrinking, in those calm, truthful orbs. He took both her hands in his, and said, simply:

"Well, Ruth, I have waited for you."

"And I could not stay away longer, John. I hoped you would come to me, but you did not; and now that I have come, you will not think me bold and forward?"

"No, Lady Ruth."

"Lady Ruth! never call me thus again! I renounce all claim to rank and title, John. There is but one earthly throne where I covet to reign!"

"And that is where?"

"In your heart!"

He caught her rapturously in his arms, weeping over her

as we weep over those returned to us from the dead.

"My own little Ruth once more! God bless her true, loyal heart! And she will not leave her humble lover for British titles and British gold!"

"Never, John! how could you think so?" she said,

seriously and fervently.

"I have empowered Mr. Montague to dispose of all my new inheritance, and transmit to me the proceeds. We can do a great deal of good with all that money, John. The title I relinquish to my young cousin across the seas, who has a handsome share of the heritage. I can afford to give up an empty name, when I have you and your love instead."

Think you John Rutherford was happy? Two months later, there was a wedding in the little church of Windfall.

signif, he knew, the size size of the saighboring stoopie had

some message from Hills Mills. The head was dead move, CHAPTER XV.

DARKNESS AND DAWN.

"Darken'd! this life, henceforth, a shadowy dream, Blinded and helpless float I down the stream."

THE country rang with the fame of the great French physician, Dr. Gerard. His name reached the secluded home of the Vernons, loaded with praise. He was a singularly successful oculist, who had performed some astonishing operations. Horace Vernon besought Winifred to make the journey to New York, and consult this great operator. Early in October she set forth for the metropolis, accompanied by Horace. They made their journey a long one, for Winifred was still feeble, and arrived at their destination, they took lodgings in a retired boarding-house.

Two days elapsed, during which Winifred rested from her fatigue, and Horace had an interview with Dr. Gerard. On the third day the fair patient, attended by her friend, was ushered into the doctor's presence. Dr. Gerard was standing at a window when his visitors were announced. He turned to greet them, but gave no welcome; his eyes were riveted upon the countenance of the lady. All the color went out

from his face, leaving it white and clear as marble.

"This is the lady whom I mentioned to you," Horace said. "The lady is your wife, I presume?"

Horace blushed painfully.

"No, sir; not my wife, but my very dear friend."

A gleam shot athwart the face of the doctor. He took Winifred gently by the arm, and led her to an easy chair in a shadowy corner of the room.

"Will you trust her with me a little while?" he asked.

"To be sure, if she consents."

"Certainly, Horace; I am not afraid," was her reply.

The doctor passed his hand soothingly over her hair, while an expression of unutterable tenderness dwelt on his face. How gentle he was! How very careful he examined those shrinking eyes! How particular he was not to agitate her! At last-it seemed an age to the impatient waiter-he called Horace, and to his inquiries, replied:

"I can give you no certain grounds for hope, but I do not despair. To-morrow, if the lady has the courage, I can decide."

"In what manner?" cried Horace. "By an operation?"

"Yes, and by that only!"

Horace shuddered. "Will it be painful?"

"Not if it should be in any manner successful. If the contrary—I will not deceive you—it will occasion some degree of suffering; perhaps more, perhaps less."

"Dear Winifred! my poor friend! Can you endure it?" She smiled hopefully. "Yes, Horace, I can bear any thing

better than suspense. Try me and see."

"To-morrow, at ten," he said, by way of a reminder, as the

carriage bore them away.

The hour arrived. Winifred, pale but firm, sat in the operating-chair. Not even Horace was allowed to remain. Dead silence reigned—neither spoke a word; there was much at stake. Not a nerve of the doctor trembled, his hand was firm as steel; his face was white and stern. It was done at last. A low cry burst from the sufferer's lips. The doctor bent down over her.

"I see! I see, though dimly!" she cried, joyfully. "I see! O God, whom do I see? Is this an illusion? Is Gerard Middleton before me?"

His arms reached out to her.

"Winifred, come to me. Come to my heart—at last mine!" She sprang up: "Gerard." She buried her face in his bosom. "Thank God!" was all that he could utter.

She thought not of her restored sight, nothing of poor, anxious Horace waiting without; all the world was swallowed

up in the one idea-Gerard Middleton.

Many days of weakness and pain did Winifred pass in a darkened chamber, forbidden to look even upon that dear face which hovered continually over her. His presence soothed her like a strain of sweet music. Perfect vision came to her never again. She could enjoy the pleasure of viewing near objects, and the companionship of books. For this incalculable favor she was very grateful. When the light of day was admitted into her chamber, Dr. Middleton brought a whitehaired man to the sofa where Winifred reclined; and, while Gerard supported the pale woman in his arms, the aged man of God united these two, so long severed, in marriage.

Horace Vernon, his face hidden in the drapery of the window, was the only witness. When the clergyman had pronounced his blessing on the new-made husband and wife and departed, Horace conquered his emotion, and came forth. He took a hand of each:

"May God bless you!" he said, earnestly. "God bless

you forever! I am content."

It was not until Winifred had been many weeks a happy wife, and the pair were settled down to their blissful life at Atherton Hall, that she knew the truth and tenderness with which she had been loved through those long years of separation. Gerard Middleton had wandered over Europe, studying his profession here and there; lonely and desolate in heart, but firm in his resolution to win for himself a name that all should speak with praise. He had succeeded. His fame spread over the continent. Gold came to his coffers, and the gratitude of thousands of human beings to his heart! But peace of mind never came! His heart had an unfilled void.

At length he had read in an American paper of the duel, and subsequent death of Milford Winthrop. Newly-awakened hope swelled his bosom, and he sailed for America immediately. He had established himself in New York, and sent faithful agents all over New England to obtain some clue to his beloved Winifred. Providence brought her to his door.

Dear reader, your good heart can imagine the happiness of those two persons who had loved each other so faithfully through years of doubt and despair; and perhaps you can, also, picture to yourself the desolation of Horace Vernon, when once more in the calm of his Southern home.

He never married, but through a long and virtuous life, the poor blessed his name, and men loved and respected him. And he found his greatest joy below, in the long visit, which

he paid annually, to his friends at Atherton Hall.

John Rutherford and his wife, living as they did, within a day's ride of the Middleton's, found much pleasure in their society; and Mr. Rutherford felt no jealousy, but only content, when the older friendship between Mrs. Rutherford and Dr. Middleton was renewed.

HIMILAGIA BULLO (MINO)

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CHILD OF THE PRAIRIE.

CHAPTER I.

THE CITY OF WAKWAKA.

"MERCY! what have we here?"

As he uttered this exclamation, Hugh Fielding pulled at his horse's bridle so suddenly that the animal was very nearly thrown upon his haunches, which was fortunate, for, had he taken another step forward, it would have been into the bosom of a little child asleep and alone upon the prairie.

The rider remained in his saddle a moment, gazing with astonishment down upon the ground where, half-covered by the tall grass and gorgeous blossoms, this vision had startled him. The infant, not more than a year of age apparently, was a little girl in a white frock, the sleeves of which were looped up with corals; she had round, rosy limbs, and a sweet face. A few flowers were grasped in one hand, the other was under her cheek; one shoe was on, the other lost, while her little mantle of blue silk was crumpled beneath her feet. As if in protection, a rose-bush leaned over her, from some of whose fullest blossoms the leaves had dropped into her golden hair.

It was not strange that Mr. Fielding was surprised, for he was eighteen miles from any habitation; and his piercing eye, darting its glances in every direction, could detect not the slightest trace of any other human being. He dismounted from his horse and took the little one in his arms, who opened

a pair of bright eyes and looked vaguely around, then wistfully into his face.

"Mamma!" she cried, in a plaintive voice, again and again, but she did not otherwise cry, or make those active demonstra-

tions of grief which her finder dreaded.

Hugh was a man of thirty-three, and ought to have been the father of several such pretty creatures of his own; but he was a bachelor, reserved, taciturn, "unskilled in all the arts and wiles" of soothing infants. He was touched almost to tears by the evident grief and forlornness of the little thing. She seemed to pine with hunger, too. He placed her upon the saddle, while he examined the contents of a brown bag which he had stored with provisions at the last settlement. Dried venison, hard bread—ah, here were some soda-crackers!—sorry food for the baby that was still perhaps dependent upon a mother's bounty for sustenance. But she was too hungry to be particular; she seized upon the cracker, and ate it with a relish, and, after finishing what was given her, looked at her new friend and smiled. That confiding smile went straight to his heart and stirred in it a new sensation.

What was to be done? Of course, he thought not for an instant of abandoning the child to the destruction of solitude; but a baby-girl was not the most desirable companion for a man going into a new country to hunt and fish, and dwell alone wherever his fancy might prompt him to wander. A sudden thought that the parents might also be sleeping somewhere in the vicinity, improbable as it was, occurred to him; and he forthwith halloed so lustily that his charge began to cry with fright, when he left off and began soothing her, patting her golden head, with some rather ineffectual efforts at baby-talk.

Mounting his horse again, and keeping her in his arms, he took a circuit of a mile around the spot, hoping to find the lost guardians. But the tiny shoe which mated the one upon her foot, and a blue ribbon-sash hanging upon the thorns of a rose-bush, were all that he discovered.

Something in the color of the blue scarf, and something in the color of the baby's eyes, which were a soft, bright, dark hazel, reminded him of a history in his past life which it was a part of his purpose in coming West to forget. He thought it very ridiculous in himself to connect things so remote from each other, even in fancy; nevertheless, he drew the child closer to his heart and spoke to it in the softest tone of his deep and musical voice.

But what was to be done? The sun was going down behind the earth as into a sea of emerald and jasper. He had meant to pass the prairie before night; but now he thought it best to remain where he was, in the faint hope that some one would come to claim his charge. He had come upon a little brook trickling through the grass in a gully, as he described the circle of a mile, with a little clump of trees to which he could fasten his horse, making it a desirable place upon which to camp out. Here he alighted and began preparations for the night. His little companion, left to herself upon the grass, commenced again her plaintive cry after "mamma, mamma!" Occasionally, in the course of preparing his supper, he would try to beguile her away from the one desire which yearned in her forlorn little heart, but in vain. Like a dove moaning in the wilderness, she kept up her sorrowful cry. A few sticks broken from the dead branch of a tree furnished him with materials for a fire, which he kindled upon the ground, the prairie grass being too green to endanger its burning. In a little tin-pot he boiled a cup of tea, a portion of which he sweetened for the child, but she was too much grieved to be induced to partake of it. His steed, who had quenched his thirst in the stream, cropped at his leisure the fragrant blossoms and rich verdure about his feet.

By the time the meal of tea, toasted crackers, and dried meat was over, twilight had descended over the scene, and the infant had sobbed her poor, weary little self to sleep. Mr. Fielding took a blanket from his portmanteau, and, being nearly as tired as she, took the sleeper to his bosom tenderly, wrapped the blanket about them, and, with some of their traps for a pillow, disposed himself for the night.

Before slumber stole upon his conjectures, he had concluded that the mystery might be accounted for by the fact that the Indians had lately been troublesome, and that there were reports at the last settlements of their having been seen prowling about the neighborhood for the past few days.

How sad and terrible it must be if some emigrant family had

been attacked by them, the father murdered, the mother borne off into slavery, and the child left to perish! What agony must not that mother at this moment be enduring! Was she young and beautiful? Had she eyes like those of the infant whose soft breath played over his cheek? There had been no traces of any murderous struggle about the spot where he found the babe; but they might have taken it with them some distance and thrown it away at last, because it impeded their flight. Thus mused the traveler until his fancies melted into indistinct visions; and, with only his horse for guard and his gun for defense, he slumbered as sweetly upon the wide plain as he had ever done in the spacious halls of a luxurious civilization.

A kiss upon his cheek and the caress of a soft hand awoke him in the morning; and he dreamed for a blissful moment that he was a married man.

"Dear Myrtle," he said, in a rapturous tone, at which the baby laughed, as if familiar with the name, thereby awakening him to a sense of his situation. Quickly the sweet dream vanished; and, as he sprang to his feet, ready dressed, for a moment a cloud of pain was upon his brow; but it faded presently as he became absorbed in his culinary preparations, while his companion sat upon the blanket and watched his movements with a pretty curiosity.

After breakfast, the two resumed their journey, Mr. Fielding thinking it useless to wait there any longer. The child sat quietly in front of him, seeming to enjoy the ride, and yet musing over some secret grief of her own; but she had no language by which to tell either her grief or sorrow, except her one word, "mamma."

The hot July sun was very endurable to Mr. Fielding, who was almost a world-wide traveler. But he observed that it scorched the lovely face of his companion, who had no bonnet to shelter her from its rays; so he contrived an impromptu shade out of his handkerchief.

It was nearly noon when they reached the city of Wakwaka, which was, for the present, the destination of the travelers. As they left the prairie and ascended a slight eminence which gave them a view of the town and surrounding scenery, Hugh reined in his horse and gazed for a while upon the

novel prospect. A long, river-like lake, whose bright blue waters lay smooth beneath the cloudless sky, flowed along between high banks of singular beauty. These bluff-like banks stretched back into narrow emerald plains, from which rose again beautiful wooded hills, between which he could catch glimpses of another glorious prairie beyond. At the foot of the eminence upon which he now was, along the south bank as smooth and fair as a terrace, lay the fifty houses which composed the present city of Wakwaka. About half of these were of canvas, gleaming whitely in the sunlight; the rest were of boards put rudely together, and three or four brick buildings which did not seem completed. The fact is, this ambitious and flourishing town had not been in existence six months before, its exact age being five months and one week. The virgin beauty of the lake-shore was already defaced by a dock, from which a little steamboat had just puffed cheerily away, leaving the group of men who had gathered at the landing to look after her a few moments, and then turn again to their different employments.

Mr. Fielding spurred up his horse and rode down along the street, taking, as he passed along with his gun on his shoulder and a baby in his arms, the place of the departed steamer in the interest and curiosity of the people.

It is doubted if any in the motley crowd who had gathered from various impulses of self-interest in that new city, could more truly be called adventurers than the couple who now made their way to the principal and in truth the only hotel. It was Hugh Fielding's business to seek adventure; and, as for the little girl, she, alas, by some strange and mysterious fortune, had been cast into a unique situation which promised only singular experiences.

The theater chosen for her first appearance in her new part seemed altogether appropriate. It was a stage upon which almost any new drama might be performed with unprecedented success. The cloth houses, the sound of hammers, the flag fluttering from the top of the one-story hotel, the rattle of an omnibus, the distant hills, the lovely lake, the flowers and berries growing upon the very street of the city, formed no more strange a jumble of objects than her life might form of events.

The arrival of a new-comer, though of constant occurrence, was still a matter of intense interest to the dwellers in Wak-waka; and the crowd upon the landing proceeded across the way and gathered about the front of the hotel to welcome with inquisitive eyes the approach of the strangers.

Hugh was not a man to be embarrassed even by the novel charge held so gently in his arm. One glance upon the group of shrewd, speculative, yet cool faces about him, revealed to him the elements upon which the rapidity of Western civiliza-

tion depends.

He smiled slightly as he glanced at the house built of rough boards with canvas wings, like some strange, unfeathered bird just settled from a flight, and thought of how he had often rested beneath the shadow of the Coliseum.

"Have our new house done next week—that brick yonder," said the landlord, who already had his horse by the bridle, as he detected the smile.

"Have you any women in the house?" asked Hugh.

"Lots of them," was the ready response.

"Well, take this child in, and have them provide some

bread-and-milk for her, if you please."

The curiosity expressed in the neighboring faces gave place to a look of admiration as he took his handkerchief from the head of the little girl. The extreme beauty of her infant countenance delighted even the coarsest in the crowd. Her golden hair curled up in short, shining ringlets, which hung like a garland about her head, the crown of her exquisite loveliness. She shrank and clung to her protector when the landlord went to take her; but when Hugh asked her to go, she obeyed. A woman, who had been looking from a window, was already at the door to take her within and minister to her comfort.

Mr. Fielding, as he dismounted, found himself in a group of men, most of them intelligent, many educated, all ready to ask after the world they had left, and to give all the information desired about their new home and its prospects. He soon related the story of the child's being found by him; and it was unanimously concluded that its parents had fallen a prey to some revengeful Indians who did not dare open warfare, but sometimes attacked unprotected emigrants. Great

pity and interest were felt; and twenty fiery hearts blazed up with a determination to hunt out and punish the marauders, if any traces of them could be found. The next thing proposed was that each man present should subscribe a sum toward the proper support and education of the Child of the Prairie (as one imaginative person proposed she should be called); and several hundred dollars were offered on the spot. But Mr. Fielding, with many thanks for their generosity, told them that, although he was, and always expected to be, a bachelor, and had hitherto regarded children as rather needless and unjustifiable intruders upon people's time and comfort, yet, as Providence had thrown this one in his way, and he was very well able to provide for her, and already loved the motherless little creature, he should himself see that she was well taken care of.

A low cheer of approval broke from some of the young men; and they gathered about the windows and doors to get another peep at the pretty heroine who was being lionized by

all the females of the house.

Hugh only waited to shake the dust of travel off him, and partake of the dinner waiting upon a long table in the canvas dining-hall, before he went to inquire after his charge. She had eaten her bread and milk, and was sitting in her nurse's lap very patiently, making no trouble, but with two great tears glittering upon her eyelids, ready to fall. When she saw Hugh, she laughed, and came eagerly to his arms. It was evident that she was a delicate flower, to be guarded from too broad sunshine and too severe storms. She seemed dismayed to receive so much attention from strangers, and clung to him with an affection which made him feel how impossible it was for him to abandon her.

"What are you going to name her?" asked one.
"I believe I shall call her Myrtle," replied Hugh.

"What makes you give her such an out-of-the-way name as that?" said another. "Mary would be much more to my mind."

"It was the name of a friend of mine," he answered; "and, besides, the meaning of Myrtle is 'love'—a pretty meaning for a child's or a woman's name; though the name does not always indicate the character," he added, with a sigh.

"As true as I am born," said the first speaker, "if the initial on the clasp of her corals is not 'M!' But, of course, her name must have been Mary."

"Of course it was," added the second.

"I think Myrtle will be very pretty," said a sweet voice in the corner.

Hugh looked that way.

"Do you know, madam," he inquired, "where I could find some kind woman who would take care of her a few days until I get my plans somewhat arranged? She shall be well rewarded."

"I will take her with pleasure, and wish no reward, of course. She will be company for me," answered the lady.

With this pleasant person, who was the young bride of a lawyer who had come out to take advantage of the making of a new country, and whose winning ways were well suited to soothe the timid child, Mr. Fielding left his little Myrtle.

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CHAPTER II.

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MR. FIELDING'S ESTABLISHMENT.

A WEEK from thence Mr. Fielding was settled to his heart's content. He had succeeded in purchasing three hundred acres lying along the shores of the lake, and including some of its most romantic portions, at a distance of not more than two miles from the city. It was not his intention to live in any community, unless it were a community of pheasants, partridges, deer, and wild-turkeys; and, if it had not been for his finding of baby Myrtle, he would have camped out until cold weather, making excursions of several days' length.

It was the fresh and wonderful loveliness of the pure water and its surrounding scenery, looking as if here for untold years nature had made one of her sweetest retiring-places, that induced him to stop near Wakwaka.

In a sheltered nook, protected from any stray winds which might prove too strong for it, and overlooking the water at its most beautiful point, he erected his canvas house. The opposite shore was lined with a wooded bank, a hill peering over its shoulder in the distance; and he had but to walk a few steps from the door to look down one of the loveliest vistas in the world of prairie-land, broken by clumps of trees, and glittering for a time with a silvery edge of water.

Mr. Fielding was a little tinged with misanthropy—as much so as a man of his mingled dignity and generosity of character could be—and there may have been some very good reason for it. Certainly he did not look like a person to whom mis-

anthropy came by nature or inheritance.

He had intended to live alone; but his finding of that stray waif upon the prairie had altered his determination. So he had two rooms to his impromptu house, one of which was occupied by a neat old lady who had consented to take charge of his domestic affairs, including little Myrtle.

For a man who had criticised the palaces of the Old World, his apartment could not be said to display that love of beauty which was one of the strong elements of his character. A bedstead—whose posts, so far from being polished by the hand of art, wore still the shining bark with which nature had dressed them—was fitted to receive the buffalo-skin and blankets heaped upon it. A shot-gun and light rifle hung upon the wall, except when out with their owner; and the traps of a hunter and the clothes of a gentleman filled the little room indiscriminately. But, upon a home-made table in a corner, some glimpses of a finer taste were apparent. Perhaps a dozen favorite books of poetry and philosophy were piled upon it, a flute lay by their side, and a brown stone mug in the center was never without its bouquet of wild-flowers.

The other half of the house was kitchen and parlor; and nobody would guess that it was bedroom also, during the night, did they not notice a little frame with blankets inside turned up snugly against the wall in the corner furthest from the stove.

"I declare, Mrs. Muggins, this is really delightful!" said Mr. Fielding, in his earnest, pleasant way, the first evening they sat down to tea.

A cool wind blew over the lake and in at the door; woodland and water glowed in the sunset light; and he could see it all from his place at the table.

A white cloth was on the board, and a brace of pheasants, and fish from the lake, and golden corn pone upon that; and upon one side sat the smart old lady, pouring tea into two little cups of blue earthenware, her clean cap on, and her eyes stealing satisfied glances at the perfection with which the fish was "done brown." And, loveliest sight of all, at the other side, in a high chair, bought in the city, with her bowl of bread and milk before her, sat the beautiful baby Myrtle, smiling over at her friend, and shedding sunshine over the place by her bright, innocent countenance.

Mrs. Muggins probably thought that her companion referred

entirely to the looks of the dishes before him.

"I am glad if you like my cooking, Mr. Fieldin'; I've generally ben reckoned a purty good hand at it," she answered, complacently.

"I do like your cooking," he responded, emphatically, as he helped himself to pheasant. "And I like the quiet of this place, too; so serene, so beautiful. If one had only traveled to Switzerland or Italy in search of it, he would go crazy with rapture; but, as it is only American, I suppose it can not be compared. I think I shall like this way of living very much, Mrs. Muggins; and, if you and Myrtle like it as well as I, I think we shall get along admirably."

"Nobody 'll complain of you, if they don't," said his house-keeper. "You must feel e'en a'most as if you was the father of that child; and a beauty she be, poor thing! She's no more trouble than nothing. The ladies at the tavern made her plenty of clothes, and I've only to take care of them. Did you say you had never been married, Mr. Fieldin'?"

"Never, to my knowledge."

"I declare, that's cur'us! Such a likely man too."

"I suppose that I ought to be married," was the light reply; "but, with you to attend to my comfort, and this little creature here to care for, I think I must get excused."

"Did you ever meet with a disappintment?" asked Mrs.

Muggins.

The gentleman looked down suddenly into his cup and commenced stirring his tea.

"Perhaps," he answered. "What if I had?"

"Nothin', only I don't think you desarved it. I guessed as much when I heard you a playin' on that fife afore supper—it sounded so heart-broken like."

"Quite a compliment to my playing; but I assure you I am far from heart-broken. There is not a sounder-hearted man in Wakwaka. And remember, Mrs. Muggins, I have not confessed to a disappointment."

So saying, having finished his tea, he took Myrtle in his

arms, and went and sat in the door of his own room.

"The girl must have ben a fool who cheated him," murmured the old lady, as she washed up the tea-things; "but as like as not she died."

In the mean time, Hugh sat holding the child on his knee. talking to her lovingly, and trying to learn her to say some words. Something in her dark eyes of a peculiar, smiling sweetness thrilled him, as if once more he gazed into the eyes

of an older Myrtle whom he had tried to banish from his thoughts for five long years:

"But still her footsteps in the passage,
Her blushes at the door,
Her timid words of maiden welcome
Come back to him once more."

The spell of memory was irresistible. He looked earnestly into the face of the child, covered her forehead with kisses, and, drawing her golden head to his bosom, sang her softly to sleep, while he abandoned himself to the past, which returned to him as if it were of yesterday. Again Myrtle Vail, the girl of eighteen, stood before him, the blush upon her fair cheek creeping down upon the snowy neck until it lost itself in the shadow of her brown tresses, while her head was slightly bent, and her red lip trembled as she said the word which assured him that he had not bestowed his passionate, but pure and earnest admiration in vain. Again he felt the trembling of the hand he had ventured to prison in his own, and again he won the timid but soulful glance of those sweet eyes as he tempted them to search his.

Again he endured the bitter sorrow of parting with her, as necessary business called him to Europe for a space of nearly two years; and again he endured the far bitterer agony of a return just in time to see her give her hand to a man in every way his inferior—younger, handsomer, perhaps, in an effeminate beauty, but vain, immature, carelessly educated, unfit to call forth the riches of the spirit which he had dreamed floated beneath the service in Myrtle's gentle character. Again he saw the pallor overspread her face, as, looking up, after pronouncing the vows which made her recreant to him, she met his eyes, and thus knew, for the first time, that he had returned.

Here he roused himself from his thoughts. He cared not to trace his abrupt departure from that place and his subsequent restless wanderings.

"Here I shall find peace, if not happiness," he murmured. His own voice called him back to the present. Myrtle was asleep upon his breast, and the night air was blowing almost too chilly upon her.

CHAPTER III.

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MR. FIELDING'S HABITS AND VISITORS.

Jonah's gourd, which sprang up and flourished in a night, was rivaled by the city of Wakwaka. Every time Mr. Fielding went to town he was surprised by the improvements so rapidly made. Building materials could not be furnished in the abundance required; and, while good-looking brick stores were going up, and the solid stone foundation for a fine court-house being laid, cloth houses were still the fashion, and considered very cool and airy summer residences by the most aristocratic.

Foresight was preparing, however, for the winter, as fast as lumber could be obtained, or clay turned into brick, residences more substantial. It was wonderful how the future prospect of elegant, perhaps palatial, mansions, upon the wide and beautifully situated lots they occupied, reconciled delicate ladies, who had once been extremely fastidious, to brave the horrors of canvas and two rooms and all the hardships of a new settlement. Not such hardships as the sturdy pioneers endure who break up the wilderness and cause it to blossom like a rose; for Wakwaka was in daily communication with one of the great arteries of travel of the country, and there was no peril of fear or loneliness, nor privation of any luxuries, except those of elegant furniture and spacious abodes.

"And these we shall have very soon," said the ladies of Wakwaka, as they laughed at their little trials, or condoled with each other upon the absence of accustomed comforts.

And still, attracted by the growing fame of the new city, adventurers came hurrying in from every boat: men of brokendown fortunes; youths of courage and energy, too hopeful and flery to await the slower chances of an old-settled country; some already rich speculators; and many hardy sons of toil, which last took up the beautiful prairie-land and turned it in-

to productive farms without cost or labor more than they would have had to give to cultivated land in most places.

All this hurry, and growth, and strangeness, and joyful expectations produced an excitement unknown and unappreciated where the crust of selfishness and conventionality has hardened. Men were met with hearty grasps of the hand, which gave their hearts as much cheer as it gave their fingers pain. Not that human nature was acted upon by the beautiful influences of Wakwaka to become otherwise than as it always is; selfishness was rampant, no doubt, in many minds, shrewd, cool, and calculating; but large prospects of rapid gains and the absence of old-time formalities had, for a season at least, expanded the hearts of her people.

And it can not be said but that a constant reminder of the lavish generosity and beauty of nature—silently spoken by her blooming prairies rolling one after another into almost infinite distance, her wood-crowned hills, and free, magnificent waters—had some effect upon the souls of those who enjoyed this profusion of her riches.

September, October, and November drifted by in a long, unbroken shower of golden sunshine, giving the new settlers good time to prepare for winter.

Mr. Fielding was not altogether idle during that time. He had his canvas house boarded up, and many little comforts added to it; and sent East for a store of books with which to beguile the winter evenings.

Hunting and fishing were his principal occupations.

Such serene enjoyment had not been his for several years as through that glorious autumn. He was a lover of the beautiful in nature as well as in art. While his physical powers were exercised and invigorated by his out-of-doors life, his spiritual nature was fed with the very honey of existence. Cloudless skies, serene and deep, hung over water and land; rich purple mists hung at morning around the horizon, but at mid-day it was changed to a belt of gold; every few days the prairies changed their hues, now gorgeous with crimson, and anon with yellow, and again with scarlet flowers. It was not so much to startle the partridge out of the long grass, or to chase the deer to the cover of the wood, that he slung his gun upon his shoulder, although he kept the house well supplied

with the choicest game, as it was to be out alone in the midst of boundless and ever-varying beauty, free to dream and to think, while breathing in life of body and liberty of soul.

Sometimes his excursions were several days in length; but a yearning after the sweet smile and prattle of little Myrtle always brought him home sooner than he had anticipated.

Her joyous cry, as she bounded to his arms, was his reward; and he fully believed the declaration of Mrs. Muggins that the

child always "paled and pined" in his absence.

She had learned to call him "papa;" and Mr. Fielding sometimes laughed aloud in his solitude while fancying the astonishment of his friends in various parts of the world—who had given him up as an incorrigible bachelor, which he intended still to remain—could they have a peep at him in his cabin, with his old-lady housekeeper and his adopted daughter. But he was happier than he had been in their frivolous society.

Prairie-fires, gleaming in the distance, and sweeping near, illuminating the nights with fitful radiance, began to be a feature of the scenery, after the November frosts had parched

the grass to the likeness of a rustling sea of jasper.

Mr. Fielding had an imagination which was not proof against splendor and novelty combined; and, upon one occasion, when the lonely night found him wandering over a hill with his gun in his hand, and one of these fires sprang from a distant wood and ran over the prairie until extinguished by contact with the lower edge of the lake, he was guilty of some lines like these:—

THE RED HUNTERS.

Out of the wood at midnight
The swift red hunters came;
The prairie was their hunting-ground;
The bisons were their game;
Their spears were of glittering silver,
Their crests were of blue and gold;
Driven by the panting winds of heaven
Their shining chariots roll'd.

Over that level racing-course—
Oh, what a strife was there!
What a shouting! what a threatening cry!
What a murmur upon the air!

Their garments over the glowing wheels
Stream'd backward red and far.
They floated their purple banners
In the face of each pale star.

Under their tread the autumn flowers
By millions withering lay;
Poor things that from those golden wheels
Could nowhere shrink away!
Close and crashing together
The envious chariots roll'd;
While anon, before his fellows
Leap'd out some hunter bold.

Their black hair, thick and lowering
Above their wild eyes hung,
And about their frowning foreheads
Like wreaths of nightshade clung.
"The bisons, lo, the bisons!"
They cried and answer'd back.
The frighten'd creatures stood aghast
To see them on their track.

With a weary, lumbering swiftness
They seek the river's side,
Driven by those hunters from their sleep
Into its chilling tide.
Some face the foe, with anguish
Dilating their mute eyes,
Till the spears of silver strike them low,
And dead each suppliant lies.

Now, by the brightening river,
The red hunters stand at bay—
Vain their appalling splendor—
The water shields their prey.
Into its waves with baffled rage
They leap in death's despite—
The golden wheels roll roaring in,
Leaving the wither'd night.

While Mr. Fielding was copying this effusion the next afternoon, some ladies called to see him; or rather they said they had come to see Myrtle; but, when young women walk two miles to call at a house where there is a pretty child and a rich and handsome old bachelor, people are at liberty to draw their own conclusions as to which is the greater attraction. For appearance's sake, however, they praised and petted the little creature, who was pleasing enough to give a coloring to all their admiration; and did not fail to pay compliments to Mrs. Muggins for the way in which she took care of her.

Some bonbons and cakes they had for her, too, which delighted her at the time, and made her ill afterward.

It is a strange fact, that when a gentleman seems to shun their society, and especially with a shade of melancholy about his unsociableness, the ladies are certain to be infatuated with him; and vice versa. Whether this arises from sympathy, or a wish to prove one's own attractions and powers upon so indifferent a subject, or from the interest which always clings to any thing mysterious, or from all three combined, who shall say? These four young women could any of them have been surrounded by admirers, and each had her choice out of two or three, without troubling herself to walk out to Mr. Fielding's upon the small chance of attracting his attention. For, as yet, the men were largely in advance, in point of numbers, of the female population of Wakwaka; and, what was better, they were all ready, or nearly ready, to provide for a wife; and thus the girls were in no danger of that forlorn fate which sometimes overtakes spinsters in the older States, where the chances for getting a living are fewer, and from whence all the enterprising young men have gone West.

It may have been the beauty of the afternoon and the beauty

of the baby, after all, which led them so far.

"I am so fond of children; and this is such a sweet little thing!" cried Miss Minnie Greggs, looking up to the gentleman confidingly, and then kissing pretty Myrtle so suggestively; after which, she tossed back her jetty ringlets, and looked up again for sympathy.

Mr. Fielding smiled into her saucy black eyes. He could

not help admiring the wiles which he understood.

"She is very lovely in all regards," he said, "and becomes more dear me all the time. I used to think children were nuisances; but I am glad of the chance which threw this one

in my path. She has become my morning-star."

"But don't you think she will need some other feminine influence in molding her character than that of Mrs. Muggins?" asked Miss Bluebird, sentimentally, in too low a tone for the housekeeper's dull ears. "Some one who will take the place of a mother—a refined being—whose looks and tones would—"

"Resemble those of my friend, Miss Bluebird," broke in

Minnie Gregg, with the gravity of the wickedest mischief.

"How can you! I declare! I shall be offended with you," cried that lady, blushing, while the others laughed.

Hugh did not laugh: some stern thought seemed to have crossed his genial humor. "No, Miss Bluebird," he answered, almost severely, "I want no influences except those of nature, and of music, and well-chosen books about this child, with such sentiments of truth and fidelity, purity and earnestness of heart, as I can instill into her. She shall be raised outside of society. She shall not be taught vanity and artifice; and then, if she fails in being what I desire, I shall believe that Mother Eve never entirely deserts her children."

For a few moments he was rather taciturn. Miss Minnie rallied from a remark she was afraid was intended as rather

personal, and changed the subject.

"Have you heard the news, Mr. Fielding? You have not! You know those horrible Indians that we have all been so afraid of?"

"We?" inquired a fearless-looking girl, who was evidently

ready for almost any kind of an impromptu adventure.

"Well, everybody else but you, then—even the men. We are going to have a regiment stationed near us this winter to keep the Indians at a distance. Just think of it—won't it be delightful? The officers will be apt to be such pleasant men, you know. And we shall have balls, of course."

"I had been teazing mother to send me back to our old home for the winter, until I heard of this," said the other girl

of the group; "but now I am quite content to stay."

"I wonder why it is that the girls always have such a passion for an epaulet on a man's shoulder," said Mr. Fielding, recovering his equanimity. "The glitter of an officer's insignia will make any man irresistible."

"Because we like our opposites; and soldiers are supposed to be brave as we are weak. We like to be defended," said

Miss Bluebird.

"I do not like officers half as well as farmers or hunters," said the brave Miss Thomas, with a saucy glance at Hugh.

"By the way," suddenly exclaimed Minnie Greggs, "I had almost forgotten to tell you what Lieutenant Serles related to me, last evening, about a party who were taken by the Indians. I was telling him about you and little Myrtle. You know the

men who volunteered from here never found any traces of the savages, But the lieutenant says that about that time and place a party of the Indians were known to have made a descent upon two emigrant wagons in the night where they had camped at the edge of a prairie. The helpless families were not dreaming of any danger, for the savages had not been troublesome for a long time, and they supposed their nearness to a settlement was sufficient security. They murdered the two men, hitched the horses to the wagons, and drove off with the women and children until they reached the cover of a deep forest, where they left the wagons, and tying the women to the animals, hurried them off to some secret retreat of theirs far away from here. The child may have been thrown aside as burdensome, or dropped by the mother in attempting to effect her own escape."

"Were the names of those unfortunate persons known?"

asked Mr. Fielding, with great interest.

"The elder of the two men was called Parker, I believe, as ascertained at the last village they stopped at. The other was Sherwood, a young man; and his wife, they said, was young and very beautiful."

"Great Heaven!"

Hugh had turned as pale as death, and sank upon his chair.

"Did you know them?" asked all, in a startled tone.

"I am quite sure they are the same," he said, after some time of agitated silence. "Poor Myrtle, I believe I named thee aright! I believe I gave thee thy mother's name!"

"What does the lieutenant think has become of the female

captives? Has no attempt been made to rescue them?" .

"Many searches have been organized. An Indian has been arrested who declares that they were murdered when it was found impossible to get them safely away."

"Circumstances seem to corroborate his account. There is

no doubt that the awful story is true."

"Poor orphan! Henceforth thou art doubly my own," said Hugh, as he took the child in his arms. He was evidently so stricken with deep anguish that the young ladies dared not offer their sympathy, but retired almost in silence.

How much Mr. Fielding suffered that night will be known only to himself and Heaven. The next day he went to

Wakwaka and sought out the officer who had communicated the story to Miss Greggs. The substance of the story was corroborated by him; but he said he doubted if the name of the younger couple was Sherwood. He had been told since that it was Smith.

But there was something in Myrtle's eyes which convinced him that she was the child of the Myrtle whom once he had thought to call his own. Her falsehood was forgotten now—

only her fearful and untimely fate was thought of.

To make assurance doubly sure, he wrote back to the East to her friends to inquire if she and her husband had emigrated to the West, and learned, in a mournful letter from a relative, that they had started for that very city of Wakwaka, and had not been heard from since.

Mr. Fielding did not tell them that he had a child supposed to be the daughter of Myrtle. As the father and mother of the young wife were neither of them living, he thought he had as good a claim to her as any one now left; and he felt that he could not resign her, at least for the present. Besides, he had the benefit of a doubt as to whether they had really any claims to this mysterious Child of the Prairie.

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CHAPTERIV

MYRTLE FIELDING'S EDUCATION.

WINTER came for the first time upon the city of Wakwaka. The lake was frozen; the little steamer was safe at her moorings, laid up for the season; the everlasting sound of the putting up of houses was almost at an end; the communication with other parts of the world was cut off, save by wagon conveyance; the daily mail became a weekly one; and the citizens and speculators ceased to talk about wild land and city improvements, and turned to considering the prospect of a railroad which should connect them with the East, and be

feasible all the year round.

Railroad speculations could not engross their minds entirely, and in their leisure hours they were ready for any kind of gayety which could be improvised. The young girls talked about the fort and the officers through the day, and dressed for frolics in the evening. They had sleigh-rides and surprise-parties, and weddings were not entirely wanting. Every week they had a ball at the new brick hotel, the Wakwaka House. The most aristocratic attended these dances (of course they had an aristocracy, though it was not as yet clearly defined and decidedly fenced off with the sharp palings of ceremony), receiving attention from all respectable persons present; while a general spirit of freshness and vivacity prevailed, which made all deficiences sources of merriment, and diffused more real pleasure than all the balls that Mrs. Potiphar ever gave.

If the girls showed too decided a partiality for officers' uniforms, the young city beaux bore it with commendable indifference, and took their harmless revenges all in good time.

Mr. Fielding was the gentleman par excellence, however: first, he was handsome; second, he was rich; third, he was reserved; fourth, melancholy; fifth, mysterious; sixth, he was not a marrying man—six good reasons why he should be sought after. He was not perfect, although the ladies called him so; and therefore he must be excused for the small portion of his sex's vanity which he inherited, which made him not insensible to the curiosity he piqued and the favorable impressions he made. This consciousness upon the part of the men is very detestable, and exists usually with no good grounds to found it upon; but in his case there was much to command attention, and he really received it with dignity, and nourished his self-complacency but very little upon it.

He could not have been called a gloomy man; and perhaps even the melancholy the ladies invested him with was half in their imaginations; though certainly during the first of the season there was the pallor of suppressed sorrow upon his brow. But his nature was a mingling of sunny geniality with a deep reserve; the warmth breaking out when subjects of common interest, such as music, beauty, or art, were being discussed, and the reserve following upon any reference to

himself personally.

The life he now lived suited him well. He had the advantages of solitude and society both. When in town, he was petted and made a favorite; when out in his own little cabin, he was away from the world of action as completely as if buried in the cell of a hermit. He would have pined for those things which make a city endurable to a gifted mindrich music, glorious pictures, works of art and luxury; but, for the present, nature was all those and more to a mind satiated with too much living. And then the novelty of playing father to a little girl! It was a very pleasant family circle, that of his home. Mrs. Muggins was as tidy as she was talkative; though he had a way of checking an excess of the latter virtue when it became wearisome. She kept little Myrtle as neat and beautiful as a lily, so that the fastidious bachelor could call her to his knee without fear of offence from soiled face or soiled garments. The child was more than the amusement of his idle hours. He took almost a mother's interest in the unfolding of the pure flower of her soul, the new developments of her mind, and the rapid expansion of her physical powers. And, while he delighted to teach her, she also taught him—many lessons of guileless faith, and the simplicity of innocence, and the loveliness of nature as God made it in its freshness.

So, with books and his flute, hunting, and his visits to town, the winter passed by. He stood up as groomsman at the wedding of pretty Minnie Greggs with the young lieutenant. Miss Bluebird avowed that he seemed preyed upon by secret grief during the evening; but no one else felt assured of it; and she could not win him to unbosom his concealed unhappiness—which, "like a worm i' the bud," fed on his heart—to her sympathy. So, out of revenge, she shortly after married a dry-goods merchant, who, at this present writing, is spoken of as one of the founders of Wakwaka, and who has retired to a residence upon the banks of the lake, adjoining Mr. Fielding's three hundred acres, and who can count himself worth two hundred thousand in Wakwaka railroad stock, and one hundred thousand in town lots, besides his pretty villa and grounds where he resides.

The spring came, and other summers and winters passed, and still Hugh Fielding lived in his cabin, hunted, fished, read, dreamed, philosophized, and seemed to change in nothing, for the years sat lightly upon him. He was content to be a kind of wonder to his neighbors, and to do as he pleased. The city grew and thrived apace; and, as the banks of the lake became thronged with beautiful residences, many a glittering lure was held out to induce him to part with his precious bit of land. But he was not to be tempted. Not an acre would he part with. "Selfish," said some. "Holding on for an enormous price," said others. "No eye for beauty—no taste. Allowing such an Eden to run wild! I wish I had it," said many a wealthy person of cultivated ideas, who coveted his possessions.

Despite of all he had his own way about it. He did not even "improve" the scenery, except here and there to plant a tree or thin one out, to have decaying timber taken off, and some beautiful level stretches kept clear for the strawberries and wild-roses, and the underbrush cleared from a grove of clms and maples which inclined down to the water's-edge at

One picturesque point.

There was only another room added to his cabin, which was made necessary by the accumulation of books, pictures,

and the like, which he often sent East for. This new room, out of respect for Myrtle, was prettily carpeted, and had a little rocking-chair, and flower-stand, and some other handsome things in it. In the mean time, while the city was growing large, and Mrs. Muggins growing old, and every thing advancing or retarding, of course little Myrtle did not stand still. A will-o'-the-wisp or a butterfly would have stood still sooner than she. She grew in size, in health, and in beauty. The nature which threatened at first too great a degree of sensitiveness and fear, hardened and grew fearless in the fresh air and unrestrained life of her country home. In the warm weather, she, like her "papa," almost lived out-ofdoors. She would ramble hours by his side, and then curl down and sleep with her head on his knee, while he read or dreamed beneath the shade of a tree or down by the water's edge on a cool shadowed rock. He taught her the name and character of all the flowers of the field and trees of the forest, so that at six years of age she was a miniature botany, bound, as it were, in rose leaves. He taught her, too, of the rocks, and sands, and waters, so that, as her mind grew, every thing, however humble, had an interest to her, and the earth was a great "curiosity-shop," much more strange and delightful, more absorbing to her fancy than the gaudy shops of the towns in which children are taught what to covet and admire.

One favorite place she had for spending her time when Hugh was away: a kind of fairy bower, made by an elm whose branches upon one side held up a beautiful wild flowering vine, while upon the other was a rose-bush always in blossom through the long summer. The open front looked upon the lake, and a moss-covered stone made a cushioned seat fit for a queen. The grass about it was clean, fine, and short, and full of violets.

She never went to school; but was sometimes taken to town to visit with other children, and had, in return, youthful

guests come to see her in the pleasant weather.

But she was educated, even in book education. Hugh patiently taught her her alphabet and to read. After that it was only necessary for her to know that he desired her to study any book he put into her hands, and her love gave the impulse which made acquirement easy.

Thus time glided on for nine years. Nine years!—a long time; and Mrs. Muggins was growing older and feebler all this time; and one day she was taken sick, and soon she died. Myrtle grieved herself ill, and Mr. Fielding did not disdain to drop a tear upon her humble grave, for she had been a faithful servant and very kind to his darling little girl.

He was obliged to be his own housekeeper for some time, for another Mrs. Muggins was not easily to be found. When she saw him fussing about in a man's awkward way, little Myrtle's womanly instincts were aroused, and she put away her at first overwhelming grief to try and aid him. He would not have believed those slender little hands could do so much. She could lay the cloth, and sweep, dust, and brush; toast bread, and pour out tea; and his room she took pride in keeping in exquisite order.

He loved to watch her flitting about like a fairy put to earthly tasks, her feet moving as if to some inward music, and her golden hair encircling her in a halo of mystic brightness. The careful gravity, the pretty air of business newly put on, were bewitching to him.

"Well, Myrtle, I think I had better not get anybody to help us: you make such a nice little maid," he would say.

"I like to help you very much, papa; but what will you do when it comes washing, ironing, and churning days?"

"Sure enough. We are not equal to all emergencies, are we, daughter?"

So, in course of time, a woman was found to take the place of the departed. She was not of as quiet and nice a mold as the beloved and respected Mrs. Muggins. Mr. Fielding did not like her to preside at his table; and so little lady Myrtle never gave up her place at the head of the tea-things.

Affairs did not go on as systematically as of old. Many little nice tasks fell to the child which Mrs. Muggins used to perform; but, happily, she liked them.

Mr. Fielding dreaded a change. He had become so accustomed to the pleasant routine of his monotonous life that he disliked the thought of its being in any manner disturbed. But a change came.

CHAPTER V.

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MRS. JONES'S NEPHEW.

Mr. Fielding received word which made it absolutely indispensable that he should go East and attend to his long-neglected interests there. What to do with Myrtle he did not know. He could not take her with him, for he had never hinted to his friends of his adoption of the little girl; and, besides, he had so much to do and so many places to visit. He dreaded the effect of the separation upon her, for he was her only friend; and he knew that she would feel very desolate without him. He could have her boarded, of course; but he did not wish to trust her in any common hands, for he expected to be away a year. Finally, he concluded to ask the child's advice.

"Oh, papa, take me with you! take me with you!" was at first her passionate cry; but, when she found that that could not very well be, she said: "Why not put me in the seminary, papa, where all the little girls in Wakwaka are sent? I shall be so unhappy, I know; but my studies will be some comfort; and I should like to learn music, so as to play for you

when you come back."

Hugh had an abhorrence of boarding-schools. He believed that many young ladies learned more lessons in dissimulation, extravagance, envy, affectation, and exaggerated sentiment, than they did in any thing useful. He knew the principal of the Wakwaka school, however, and liked her well as a woman of character and high moral purposes. He trusted greatly, too, to Myrtle's intense love of nature, and to the influence of her early years, to defend her from the frivolities he so dreaded.

In a few weeks, his arrangements were all completed; and one spring morning he left his little Myrtle, weeping inconsolably in the arms of Mrs. Dennison, her new protector.

"She must have all that is necessary to enable her to ap-

pear as well as the rest of your pupils: there will be no trouble about the bills, Mrs. Dennison. And every accomplishment for which she seems to have a liking she must have the means of acquiring. If she has any peculiar taste or talents, let them develop under your judicious care, and I shall be fully satisfied with what you do for her. Love her, if you can; and I know you will, for she is a tender flower, and will wither if left too solitary."

Mr. Fielding's voice trembled a little as he uttered the last sentence; and he kissed poor Myrtle hastily, for fear the lady would see the tear upon his cheek. The next instant he was gone; and Myrtle was left to begin her new course of life.

It was many days before there was much color in her cheek, or light in her eye; and her kind guardian did not put her

immediately into the school routine.

Like one of nature's fairest flowers, her spirit expanded in the sunlight of affection; and, as she was sweet, unoffending, beautiful, and the probable heiress of the rich Mr. Fielding, every attention was showered upon her, until the smiles were won back to her dark, luminous eyes, and the roses to her cheeks.

The wonderful amount of unexpected knowledge possessed by her new pupil astonished Mrs. Dennison, while her ignorance of some of the "first branches" was equally surprising and amusing. Geography and grammar were unknown to her, while she could talk in Latin and French, quote page after page of classic poetry with beautiful emphasis, and tell more about botany, ornithology, and geology, than the most advanced scholar of the school. Besides this she had many quaint and philosophical ideas which made her appear surprisingly precocious, but which were simply the result of her having been made the sole companion and friend of a man of polished education and gifted mind. Her teacher went to work to "systematize" her acquirements, and instruct her in things practical in the society about her.

A year seemed a great while to Myrtle. The confinement to rules of one who had lived so free a life was, at times, rather burdensome; and she welcomed the long vacation with excessive delight for the liberty it gave her, but mostly because her father was to come back to her. He came, bringing her many beautiful presents, which, at first, she was too happy to regard. They went out and spent two or three weeks at the cabin, in the old way, cooking their own meals, and rambling about the country most of the time.

Myrtle's joy was sadly discomfitted by learning that Mr. Fielding had escaped from the East only long enough to make her a visit, and that he was going back for a long, long time, as soon as her school opened. It made every moment she spent with him still dearer. It sounded like a bell tolling at a funeral when she was summoned back to her studies.

Events shaped themselves so unexpectedly with Mr. Fielding, a journey to France being among them, and a long stay in that country to settle an estate coming to him from his mother, that he did not return to Wakwaka, after the first visit, for four years.

In those four years Myrtle Fielding had grown into maidenhood—she was little Myrtle no longer. The most lovely and beloved of the pupils at the seminary, distinguished for grace of manner and purity of soul, the pride of her guardian upon all occasions of public display, and the beauty of the school, she still pined, in loneliness of heart, for some one to belong to, some one who would call her daughter, and receive the lavish affection of her heart, which now continually wasted itself in the sands of vain regret. Such passionate, tear-bedewed letters as she addressed to her adopted father would certainly have called him to her side, had it been in his power to leave the interests which bound him where he was.

It was a very dangerous state for a young lady's heart to be in, this craving after love and confidence. Such stores of affection, lying ready to be given away, would be very apt to find somebody to ask for them; and, if their proper owner did not appear in due time, some interloper might receive what had been accumulating for his benefit. Of this danger, Myrtle herself was most profoundly ignorant; and Mrs. Dennison, wise and experienced as she was, had never given it a thought. Mrs. Dennison's young ladies were supposed to be beyond the reach of human weakness.

Ah, Hugh Fielding! Hugh Fielding! where art thou while this fair child of thy affections is blushing and blooming into her sixteenth summer? Hast thou no presentiments? One Saturday in May, Myrtle had permission to go out to "her home," as she still called Mr. Fielding's place. A man and his wife had been put in the cabin to keep things in order; and, whenever the young mistress chose to go out and spend her holiday rambling through her old haunts, she was sure of a good dinner and a warm welcome from them.

It was a delightful day, and, as she passed along, her guitar in her hand, her heart exulted in youthful fullness of life. A young lady with a guitar is always romantic, as maidens of thirty-five who bend gracefully over the blue-ribboned instruments in their boudoirs are certain to know—and our young lady was none the less romantic for being totally unaware of it. She, happy and beautiful, thought nothing of effect, but strolled along, enjoying the freedom from school, and thinking of that long looked-for, long hoped-for father whom she was now expecting home in a very few weeks. Then she was to leave school, and they were to live together, and be happy, as of old.

Thinking of all this, Myrtle could hardly wait until she got beyond the elegant residences which stretched for a mile along Lake street, before her gayety burst forth in singing; and she went caroling along the beautiful road, rivaling the birds who

warbled in every tree.

Arriving at her destination, she just stepped in the house to give the woman "the news," and invite herself to dinner, and then fluttered out into the sunshine again, to spend the day, like the butterflies and flowers, in aimless pleasure.

All unambitious to please a more critical audience, she finally rested herself in a little bower which commanded her favorite view of the lake, and began tuning her guitar for the birds overhead. For a while her fingers tinkled over the strings in wandering chords of melody; and then she began to sing. Fresh and pure as her own young soul, silvery as the waters at her feet, harmonious as the air she breathed, was her voice; and she sung now as she never could have done in parlors or at "exhibitions." All the sweetest music which she knew came to her without effort; it appeared to her as if the wild roses at her feet turned a little to listen, and the birds were not backward in trilling their approval.

The elm above her bent over her lovingly; her cheeks

flushed with the joy of her own singing; she made such a picture as young poets dream about but seldom realize.

Is it any wonder, then, that a certain youth, poet and artist both, who happened in that vicinity at this auspicious hour, should have felt as if he had intruded into Paradise, and held

him breathless in tremulous pleasure and surprise?

It would seem that he had come forth double-armed against unsuspecting Nature, for a pencil and slip of foolscap stuck out of his coat-pocket, and a portfolio of drawing materials was in his hand; but all thoughts of using either were ban-ished, and he leaned against the trunk of an oak, not very far away from the singer, scarcely knowing whether he really saw and heard, or whether his fancy had bewitched him into some ancient land of goddesses, or some unsubstantial Eden out of which he could nevermore find his way.

Ah! he had indeed blundered into an Eden out of which he should never, never more go forth with free footsteps.

But he did not know it yet.

So the young girl sung and sung for his pleasure, as well as that of the birds, until she fairly wearied herself out. Her guitar slid down into the grass, and she flung back her hair, with an exclamation:

"Oh, dear! I'm hungry! I wonder if it is dinner-time?"

It was a very useful speech to make at that enticing period when the youth was just looking to see her fly away in a golden cloud—it convinced him that she was of the earth, earthy, and gave him intense satisfaction.

At that moment she detected him, and knew by his blush that he had been listening.

"The impudent fellow," she murmured—as if he were to blame.

Affecting not to see him, she gathered up her bonnet and guitar and retreated to the house.

"Waal," said Mrs. Jones, as she made her appearance, "your walk and the dumplins are done at the same time. Dinner is just ready: I'll ring the bell for the men, and we'll set down."

The men! Myrtle had never known of but one man about the premises; and, as there was no farming to be done, she could not conceive of the use for another. Sure enough, the table was set for four. She asked no questions, but waited for the summons to dinner to gratify her curiosity in due time. Mr. Jones came in, presently, and shook hands with her according to his custom, "hoping to find her flourishin'."

"Where's John?" asked the wife, as they drew their chairs

to the table.

"Comin'," said the husband, as he lifted the cover from a platter of fried trout.

"Comin'" he was, for at that minute he entered the door, doffing his straw hat with a graceful motion, and setting his camp-stool down in a corner.

"My nephew, John Jones, Miss Fieldin'."

Myrtle made her coldest, most queenly bow. Nevertheless, she detected the slightest hint of a mischievous twinkle about the eyes of her new acquaintance, which the polite gravity of the rest of his countenance belied.

He sat down to dinner.

"You've been a strolling round, too, hain't you, John?" asked Mrs. Jones, as she handed him his coffee. "Did you and Miss Fieldin' see each other when you was out? I reckoned you'd meet."

"I saw Miss Fielding," returned the young man, "but I

can not say whether she saw me or not."

Myrtle made no reply, being occupied with her fish.

"You've both of you such a love for rambling about and takin' likenesses, you ought to be acquainted. Two artists, as you call yourselves, at my table, I s'pose I ought to feel proud."

There was just the slightest haughty motion to Myrtle's head, as good Mrs. Jones spoke of an acquaintanceship with her nephew, which proved a little innate aristocracy; but the young girl was sweetness itself, and could not be forbidding long at a time: so she smiled at the speaker, and kept her eyes carefully from the nephew. Mrs. Jones had not the least idea but that her handsome, wild, "smart," fearless young relative was "fit for a queen's" friendship; and neither was Myrtle quite sure but that he was.

"Proud of fiddlesticks!" said her husband, testily. "If John would quit his do-nothin' ways of trying to make an artist of himself, there would be somethin' to be proud of. I've e'en-a'most give up all hope. If he'd quit pencils and such little patterin' trash, and take to lawyerin' or farmin', he'd suit me better. Not that I mean to be harsh," he added, in a softer tone; "and not but makin' picters is pretty work for young gals."

Myrtle caught the young gentleman's eye, as old Mr. Jones concluded his speech, and laughed outright in her sweet,

merry way.

"Do not make any apologies for being severe upon us," she said. "We know it's the fashion of the world to think there is common sense, as they call it, in nothing but in making money; so we do not expect sympathy."

"True!" responded the nephew, emphatically; and he and the beautiful girl opposite him began to feel more

friendly.

"Waal, how are we to get along without money, I'd like to know?" asked Mr. Jones, senior, but in that gentle tone which he always used in speaking to Myrtle.

"Oh, don't ask me!" cried she; "I know nothing about it —I have never thought. I suppose papa furnishes me with what I want; and so I have not been obliged to ask.".

"About as much as women usually know!" growled her

questioner, with a laugh.

A general good-humor prevailed at the close of the meal, after which Mr. Jones took his nephew off to look at the cattle, which gave the aunt an opportunity of telling all about him—what a "likely" boy he was, and what great idees he had got in his head, but how modest and good-humored he was, for all—that he was her favorite, and she'd asked him to come and stay with them as long as he liked—that he "writ verses," and "took profiles,"—and wouldn't Myrtle let him take hers for them,—they'd set great store by it, etc.; to all which Myrtle listened with keen interest, while her eyes kept wandering to the window looking for the return of the object of their talk. And when his bright face and black curls flashed past, her heart gave a little bound, she knew not wherefore.

To please the kind old woman she allowed him to sketch her in crayon, and then she had to sing some of her holiest melodies for old Mr. Jones, and then—Mr. Jones, Jr., asked her to walk out, and show him some of the pretty bits of

scenery in the neighborhood.

And, if John Jones could hardly appreciate the beauty of the spot, as pointed out to him by the excited young creature before him, for thinking of the clustering glory of her hair, the faultless loveliness of her features, and the expression of infantine innocence lighted with brilliancy of soul which rendered them doubly attractive, it must likewise be confessed that Myrtle caught herself at many a stolen glance at the face of the high-spirited, interesting boy.

The next Saturday, Myrtle went again to "her home," and every Saturday henceforth for weeks. This was always her custom in feasible weather; and Mrs. Dennison must not be blamed. Could she have dreamed that the people at the cabin had a nephew? or that her fastidious scholar could have been pleased with an unknown John Jones? or that the said John was an artist, and a very handsome, polite and

fascinating boy?

A golden mist hung over Myrtle's studies, obscuring their meaning in a haze of splendor. Perhaps the reason of her great and startling happiness, her unwonted moods of reverie, her constantly thrilling anticipations, was that she was soon to see her father. . This did indeed take up a large portion of her thoughts; and she looked forward to the meeting with the intensity of a four years' old anticipation.

One Saturday she was no longer left to doubt the full meaning of her late emotions. In the bower beneath the elm, in an unexpected moment of impassioned feeling, her boy-lover had sunk at her feet: and she had smiled upon his avowal.

She did not ask if he had position—if he had wealth—if her father would approve-if her lover was worthy of her-if she was doing her duty; for when did a young girl, for the

first time in love, pause to answer such questions?

Myrtle believed as fully in the truth and worthiness of her lover as she did in her own existence. She knew her father would approve; and, in the mean time, she waited for him in ardent expectation.

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CHAPTER VI.

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MR. FIELDING RETURNS HOME.

AGAIN Mr. Fielding stood upon the eminence from which he first looked down upon Wakwaka. Below him lay a city of twenty thousand inhabitants; and on either side were gardens gorgeous with cultivated flowers, tree-shadowed avenues, fine mansions, and a costly, fashionable church. Beyond was the prairie upon which he had picked up the stray waif which had since become the "light of his eyes," the delight of his existence—something to love, to plan for, to make happy. That prairie waved with wild-grass and unnamed blossoms no longer: it was checkered with fields of green corn and wheat just gilded with the June sun; and a railroad passed in a straight, shining line across its bosom. While he lingered and looked, the iron horse came shrieking and panting along it, in place of the majestic wild steeds which once swept in their might through the long and rustling grass.

Thoughts of the past and present stirred strangely tender emotions in Hugh's breast. He remembered the little creature he had held so closely to him as he rode over the hills; he remembered the tragic fate of her mother, that beautiful woman who, alone of all the women in the world, had bowed down his heart, and whose weakness or whose falseness had poisoned all of his existence for the last twenty years.

Thinking of all this, he hurried on, eager to greet his long-forsaken little Myrtle—for little she still seemed to him. He knew her better in memory than in present reality. He had left the coach on the hill, that he might have a better opportunity of observing the changes in the town. As he passed along the handsome street, he saw Mrs. Dennison's door-plate on a larger building than she occupied when he left, for her school had grown with the city. He rang, and was shown

into a receiving-room, where he sent his name to Mrs. Denni-

son and his daughter.

He sat waiting in impatient joy, eager to see his child again, when the door opened, and she glided in. He arose to his feet instinctively, but the words he was to have spoken were unsaid.

It was all in vain that Myrtle had kept telling him in her letters how much she had grown, and that she was quite a young lady, and all that. To be sure, he had entertained a faint idea of her having put up some of her curls and lengthened her frocks a little, and that perhaps she would be a little awkward in her transition state from pretty embroidered pantalettes to dignified long dresses. But this Myrtle !-- the word "daughter" died in his heart, and another word leaped up. It was as if the vision of his early manhood-that glorious vision which had invested life with such a brightness, only to vanish and leave it more dark and prosaic than before-again lived and breathed before him. Here was the same slender and rounded form, elate with health and an unconscious grace, the same brown hair falling in shadowy masses touched with gold, the same fair face, the same eyes beaming their luminous sweetness upon him.

"Myrtle!" he murmured.

She hesitated a moment, as if wondering why he did not open his arms to receive her, and then flew to him, and flung her arms about his neck.

"Father! dear father!" she sobbed, with a little burst of joyful tears; and then she kissed his cheeks a dozen times, and leaned her head on his shoulder, laughing and wiping away the sparkling drops from her eyes.

"Father, indeed!" thought Hugh to himself, as those soft lips showered their kisses upon him. "Thank Heaven,

though, I am not your father!"

"Are you not glad to see your little girl?" asked Myrtle, suddenly, grieved at the silence with which he received her caresses. "Oh, papa, you have forgotten your Myrtle!"

He yearned to take her to his breast, and kiss her with the passionate love which was struggling in his heart; but he felt that it would not be a paternal kiss, and so he gave her none. He knew that her girlish timidity would shrink from so sudden an expression of feeling, could she be conscious of its nature, and its perceptions of truth were too delicate to permit him to deceive her. But oh, what a sweet hope had flowered into beauty in his soul! Hugh Fielding forgot that he was forty-eight years of age. He was as strong, as handsome, as full of life as ever, and he forgot that he was growing old. He did not ask himself if he was the ideal of a young girl's lover. The surprise was too sudden, too overpowering—he did not as yet even question his own emotions.

"No, Myrtle," he said, "I have not forgotten you—scarcely for an instant. I have been as eager as you for this meeting. But I was so surprised to find you so tall, so beautiful, so much

of a young lady."

Myrtle blushed and laughed.

"Didn't I tell you, papa, that you would be astonished?"

At this moment Mrs. Dennison came in, having paused to arrange her ringlets and put on a new, coquettish little thread-lace cap, with lilies-of-the-valley drooping from its softness,

and mingling with her still raven curls.

The beautiful and satisfactory appearance of her pupil had had the desired effect upon Mr. Fielding, for he greeted her with marked pleasure. His joy, his gratitude, tinged his manner with rosy warmth; and she being equally gratified, they were a happy trio.

"Would you think, Mrs. Dennison, papa was amazed to find me grown so tall?" cried the young girl. "He imagined

I had stood still for the last four years."

"I suppose he hardly realized that he would have a young lady on his hands, ready to be introduced into the world. Do not you think it a great responsibility, Mr. Fielding?" with a sweet smile.

"Why, yes! certainly; it presents itself to me in a new

light," was the rather hesitating reply.

"Oh, papa, I assure you I shall not be the least trouble," laughed Myrtle. "I have never teased Mrs. Dennison very

much, and I shall tease you still less."

"Your daughter says truly that she was never much trouble to me. She seems more like a child than a pupil. It will be a severe struggle for me to give her up to you. I feel like a mother to her."

"You have been very, very kind," murmured Myrtle, leaving her clasp of her father's hand to glide over and give her preceptress a kiss. "But we shall live so near that I can come to see you every week, and you can spend the vacations with us. Will not that be pleasant, papa?"

"Delightful!" he replied; for whatever pleased Myrtle,

pleased him.

Myrtle had to resign her new-found treasure while he went to his hotel to rid himself of the dust of travel. But he returned, by invitation, to tea, and she had a happy evening. Once Mrs. Dennison sent her from the room for a while upon some excuse, for, as she told Mr. Fielding, she had an important matter to speak of, which her interest in the dear child

prompted should be said.

"You know," she said, in this confidential communication, "that Myrtle is no longer a child. She has graduated with the first honors of my school, and must now take her place in society, Mr. Fielding. She requires a female friend and chaperon: some relative of yours, perhaps, you can invite to reside with you for that purpose. I wish that Myrtle had a mother; but, as that can not be, I think it well for you to think of what I have suggested; and more especially, as you are only her adopted father: to be sure you think of her as fondly and tenderly-"

"I do," interrupted her listener.

"As if she were your own child; yet the world-since we live in the world, Mr. Fielding, we must regard its dictates."

Hugh was really much obliged to the lady for what she had said and hinted. He confessed that, since he had seen Myrtle, some idea of this difficulty had dawned dimly upon his mind, but he had not yet had time to reflect upon it. If Mrs. Dennison would consent, he should leave her pupil with her a few weeks, until some arrangements could be made.

This plan pleased her very much. She would have an opportunity of impressing upon him deeply the necessity of a

mother for Myrtle.

In the mean time, as the object of this discussion came gliding in her radiant beauty back into the room, Hugh smiled at his inward thought of how little Mrs. Dennison knew of his real purposes, of how little she suspected the ease with

which he could take upon himself the office of protector. Thus do people oftentimes work at cross-purposes.

Myrtle sang and played, bewitching the heart of her bachelor guardian more and more; and when at last she kissed him good-night, and he went to his dreams, they wore more

the roseate hue of twenty-two than forty-eight.

The next day, he began to display that energy which had not particularly marked his character since the mainspring of hope had been withdrawn. He took Mrs. Dennison and Myrtle out to his place to select a situation for the mansion which he had already partially contracted for. Of course, the elder lady was glad to have a voice in the matter which might hereafter be of importance to her; and she took it as a very favorable symptom that she was asked to make one of the party. Hugh was only acting upon her suggestions that he must have a chaperon for the young girl.

They alighted before the cabin door, where John Jones, the artist, came out and assisted the ladies to alight. Did Hugh mark the blush upon the cheeks of the young couple? Of course he did not. Never was there a man blinder to truth

and fate than he.

After Mr. Fielding had exchanged greetings with the tenants of his house, and been introduced to their nephew, he invited the latter to accompany them, and they started out on their search.

The fine, artistic taste of the boy at once attracted Hugh's attention, and he learned that the young man was an artist by profession. It was John himself who, with becoming modesty, pointed out the spot which he would deem most desirable; and its admirable fitness striking all the rest of the party, helped to complete the good opinion Mr. Fielding had involuntarily formed of him.

"There is certainly a good deal of genius about that young fellow," he remarked to Myrtle, when John was busy talking about pictures with Mrs. Dennison. "He has a glorious eye—full of fire and frankness."

How the young girl's heart leaped up !—while she made not the least reply. Alas, Hugh flattered himself that that glowing cheek and drooping eye was an evidence of some gentle emotion for him! Learning that the young artist had made architecture his study, Mr. Fielding gave him a commission to draw the plan for the proposed residence, giving him a summary of what he should like as to size, style, and expense. He was usually a man of piercing vision, and but few things escaped his keen apprehension; yet, all-absorbed as he was in his own dreams, he did not notice the expressive glance and stolen pressure of hands with which Myrtle and the young man parted. Mrs. Dennison, too, bewildered by gorgeous visions of a mansion over which she was to preside, the site for which she had just seen selected, was deaf, and dumb, and blind to every thing but Mr. Fielding.

So the party drove back to town as contented with each

other as when they started out.

Myrtle was impatient to get away from the seminary, as school-girls usually are. She did not know how to wait for the new house. If it would not have involved the necessity of driving John Jones away, she would have wished the cabin immediately vacated, that they might return to their old, romantic way of living. Mrs. Dennison was so continually with them that it seemed as if she should never get an opportunity of revealing to her father the weight that was on her hearta confidence she did not fear so much to make, since she saw how he favored her lover. When she actually found herself walking out to the farm alone with Mr. Fielding, her heart began to palpitate frightfully with anticipation. She found that what she so longed to say was very hard to put into words, after all. So they passed onward, Hugh doing most of the talking, until they reached the bower. The sight of the spot where her lover had sank upon his knee at her feet impelled her to the trial.

"Dear father," she began, in a faltering voice, "I have

wished so much for an opportunity-"

A long pause, while she stood picking a rose to pieces, the color suffusing cheeks and brow.

"Dear father-"

"Never call me father again!" cried Hugh, in a sudden burst of passionate energy.

She looked up amazed. His cheek was likewise flushed; and his dark eyes were bent upon her with an expression which she could not understand.

"I can not endure it," he said, grasping her hand tightly "Every time you have uttered that word since my return, it has almost distracted me. Can not you guess why, Myrtle?"

Her eyes fell under the glow of tender light which burned

in his. She trembled with a sudden apprehension.

"It is because I love you with other than paternal love, darling Myrtle. Since the first moment of my return, I have felt how impossible it was for me to resist the torrent of passion which rushes through my heart. You are to me my Myrtle—the Myrtle of old, whom I once loved with the fervor of youth. It is true that your mother—for I feel that she was your mother—was false; but, in your heart, Myrtle, there is nothing but truth. You have not learned the ways of the world. You are my boyhood's dream. Will you marry me?"

Poor child! how she trembled! He thought it was all with maiden timidity, and put his arm around her and drew her to his side. She leaned her head upon his shoulder, sobbing: "You are my father, Mr. Fielding. Oh, still remain so, or you will break my heart!"

"Father!" again he exclaimed, in a voice of such concentrated feeling that she involuntarily looked up into his pale face.

"I tell you I will not hear it. Wife is a much dearer term than daughter, Myrtle"—how tenderly he spoke the word wife!—"and, if you can not be that, I must go away again—back to the loveless life I led before I found you, a little sleeping, helpless child, upon the prairie."

With a great, high-hearted struggle of duty and gratitude over youthful love, Myrtle flung her arms, in the old childish

way, about his neck.

"You shall not do that, fa- Hugh; I will be whatever you wish. I will be your wife, Mr. Fielding."

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CHAPTER VII.

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THE PLOT.

Mr. Fielding was reclining at his leisure upon a knoll beneath a tree, half-hidden by the long grass which rustled around him. A volume of "Shakspeare," open at the "Midsummer Night's Dream," had nearly dropped from his hand; for he had forgotten all about the fairies and the lovers of the lay in musing upon his own happiness. The clink of workmen's hammers, as they carved and polished the stone for his new house, smote upon his ears pleasantly; for, as the hum of the bee tells of summer and summer sweets, the soft tumult of the distant work told of a home and a wife.

The first thing which roused him from his reverie was the sound of approaching voices, conversing in low but earnest tones. Looking up, he saw his Myrtle and the young artist slowly walking, arm in arm, to and fro, on the level stretch just beneath him. At first, he could distinguish no words, and, indeed, he did not wish nor intend to, though his curiosity was excited by the absorbing interest with which they appeared to listen and reply. At last, they paused quite near him, and, throwing their arms about each other, sobbed like two little children.

"A pretty scene! behold it, ye heavens and earth!" muttered Hugh, between his compressed lips, his vest-buttons ready to burst with his suppressed anger. "Is there no truth in woman?"

After yielding to their passionate grief for a time, Myrtle stood back, and folded her hands tightly together. He could see her beautiful face bathed in tears.

"Go, John," she said, in that voice of forced calmness which tells most plainly of despair. "I must never see you again. You will not blame me, ever, in your thought, I know. You will not call me false. I should be false to every impulse of

gratitude and duty did I consult our happiness before that of my friend, my benefactor, my more than father. You know all that he has done for me—all the claims he has upon me. I should rather we should both be miserable all our lives than to be the one to inflict pain upon him. You do not ask it, do you, John?"

"No, no, I do not. His claims are superior to mine. But

oh, Myrtle, it is killing me!"

"Don't say that, John. You will be happy some time, if only to reward you for your noble sacrifice now: I know you will. Heaven will bless you. Good-by."

Her companion gazed at her as if he could not tear himself

away.

"Go, go, dear John. Good-by."
"O God! Myrtle. Good-by."

He turned from her with a listless, weary step, and went away, leaving her leaning against a young maple-tree, looking

after him with blinded eyes.

Hugh had heard and seen it all. Slowly his anger had melted away, as he heard this youthful pair bravely renouncing what was their evident happiness for him. For the first time, his own selfishness appeared to him. What right had he to require the love and duty of that young heart which had turned so much more naturally to a more fitting mate? Yes, he had to acknowledge, proud and conscious of his rare acquirements as he was, that John Jones, with his boyish beauty and enthusiasm and fresh feeling, was a more suitable companion than he for the fair girl who had chosen him. Yet he had not meant to be selfish. He loved Myrtle too well for that. Ah, it was always his fate to play the martyr-to see the untasted cup snatched away, to know no fruition of his hopes. He was too much of a hero to shrink from the crisis. He could not blight the happiness of two young souls for a few years of bliss for himself. He would emulate the generosity which he had just seen. He wanted to rise and call the boy to return and receive from his hands the most precious gift which he had to bestow. But when he attempted to call, he found his throat so parched that no sound would come from it. The disappointment was too terrible—it had come upon him too suddenly.

The clink of workmen's hammers still smote upon his ears, but now the sound was full of pain; he felt as if he must put a stop to it; he wished a paralysis to seize upon that noble building, smiting it, as it stood-fixing it forever, unfinished and desolate—that it might never fulfil its destiny as a home of warmth, and luxury, and comfort, the shelter of loving hearts, the birth-place of happy children. Unfinished, and going to decay, the unfulfilled promise of a home, showing its wealth of rooms and splendor of proportions, only to make its ruin the more conspicuous-would it not be like his life, thus unsatisfactory, thus cheated of its development? A bitterness more bitter than that of his first disappointment welled up in his soul. From under the shadow of the hand upon which his forehead was drooped, he watched in silence, until the young girl had wept herself quiet and walked away in the direction of the town. Then he arose and sauntered listlessly toward the new mansion. Young Jones was overseeing the work as usual. Perceiving Mr. Fielding, he approached him.

"I have sudden and very important reasons for resigning the charge of your work," he began, in a low but firm voice.

"How, now?" interrupted Hugh, angrily.

"I do not think I shall put you to any inconvenience by doing so," continued the young man; "the plans are so minutely finished, and the work so far progressed, that it can be finished without trouble. Besides, I have consulted an architect of Wakwaka, who promises to take my place—"

"Take your place—no one can take your place, John Jones!" Now this might be intended as a compliment; if it

was, it was thundered forth in a strangely savage tone.

"I assure you I shall not release you, sir; you must fulfil

your engagement with me, or forfeit the whole."

Mr. Fielding was usually so courteous and considerate in all his dealings, that John looked up amazed; there was a dark look upon his countenance which he had never before observed.

"Ah!" thought he, sadly, "can it be possible he is so unjust that he has such a temper? if this is the case, poor Myrtle,

I pity you."

"Yes, sir! you must conclude this work according to agreement. From not one article of the contract will I absolve you."

Poor Hugh! his companion little guessed what a tempest warred within him; and that he was only putting on a little outside fierceness to cover a purpose the most unselfish and pure. The only consolation he had in his solitude of heart, was the playing of a pretty farce, by which he kept two young people miserable for the time being, with the expectation of surprising them with a double and overwhelming happiness by-and-by. Not one hint did he give of the knowledge he possessed, but exacted of the young architect the fulfilment of his contract, thus keeping him in the vicinity so fraught, to him, with dangerous dreams and mocking desires. Almost every day, as the summer sped by, he would pierce the heroic breast of the youth with some such shaft as the following:

"Hurry up the workmen, John, my boy. Don't you know the wedding is set for the 10th of September? We must have

wedding and house-warming at the same time."

Or this :-

"You are doing so nicely, John, you shall come to the wedding to pay for this. You shall dance with the bride."

As often as twice a week his handsome open barouche would drive up into the new grounds; the spirited bay horses would be checked with a gay flourish, and the owner of the establishment would hand out its future mistress to spend a half-hour in inspecting the progress made on the mansion, and giving his opinion as to this improvement and that, and would it suit her taste to have things thus and so, as if he feasted upon their secret misery. Mr. Fielding seemed to make opportunities for throwing the young pair into each other's society. Their tastes were mutually consulted, and they were left to decide matters of minor importance to themselves. It was cruel of the arch plotter-he knew it was, yet he justified himself with glowing pictures of a future surprise in which all this wretchedness should be blotted out in sudden splendor, and he only be the suffering party-a sufferer whom no one should know was wretched. It would have been hard enough for the young couple to forget each other if they had separated at once and forever, as they had resorved to do. He made the self-imposed task, one which humar nature rebelled against, yet he took a strange pride in per eiving the noble principle of both-how well they guarded 'heir looks and

actions-how calm their voices, how innocent their greetings,

and farewells.

Myrtle was acting according to the promptings of gratitude and duty; and she did not intend to humiliate her sacrifice by any thought or deed which should wrong the man she had promised to marry. She meekly obeyed his suggestions as to the preparations for the approaching marriage.

"Have you plenty of money to buy pretty things, Myrtle?"

"I suppose so, Mr. Fielding. My purse is always supplied. No matter how much I waste, the next time I open it, it is full."

"A comfortable purse, indeed. But really, my dear, you are not extravagant. Have you ordered the wedding-dress?"

"Mrs. Dennison has, I believe. I trusted it to her."

"I hope it will be a pretty one. Don't fail to have it pretty, Myrtle. Do you know I am particular about ladies' dress? I like to see youthful and pretty creatures looking like roses and lilies."

"Mrs. Dennison will see that it is all it should be-she has

the same taste, I believe."

"And are you indifferent? Young girls usually go halfcrazy over the delight and excitement of the bridal trousseau."

"Why, no, Mr. Fielding, I hope I am not indifferent. I

should like to look to please you."

How wearily the young head drooped against his shoulder! He looked earnestly into her face. She was so beautiful-he loved her so much-almost was he tempted to renounce his vowed self-denial, to accept the expected sacrifice. He could not give her up-he would not! She was his; she looked upon herself as his wife; was it not more than man could do, to put her into the arms of another? The arm he had laid about her waist drew her so tightly that she sighed with the pain. It was the first time he had bestowed one caress upon her for weeks, except a quiet kiss upon the cheek at meeting and parting. She did not know it, but there "were farewells in a kiss"-a farewell to all such future joy, in that one passionate embrace.

"This is the fifth of September," said he, seating her by his side, and studying her drooped face; "in five days, Myrtle!

It is time the wedding-dress was made."

"It is made, and it is beautiful enough to please you, be you as fastidious as you may: white silk, rich and shining, covered with costly, delicate lace; flowers on the bosom; a wreath for my hair, and a vail of the most exquisite design. Mrs. Dennison sent to New York for them. Mrs. Dennison takes great interest in these things; but she does not seem in as good spirits lately. She says I am to be envied."

She seemed to be talking to keep thought away, and to prevent him saying those tender things which girls generally love to hear. He looked at her closely while she chattered away; her cheek was surely growing thinner, though suffused with the bloom of excitement; there was a sadness, as of unshed tears, in the faltering eyes—yet she smiled, such tremulous, lovely smiles, and tried hard to seem gay and glad. He worshiped her all the more, as he saw the depths of her character thus proved by circumstance. Those gentle smiles touched him to renew more firmly his vow to secure her happiness, and let his own take care of itself.

"It is only five days more," he murmured. "Let me keep you till then; let me call you mine until then. Five days will not rob you of many dimples which the future will not restore to your cheeks."

"What did you say, Mr. Fielding?"

"I was 'talking in my sleep'—no matter what I said. Mrs. Dennison has been low-spirited, has she? Well, I have a present for her. Ask her to accept it from me as a trifling return for her kindness to you. She must wear them to the wedding."

He showed her a velvet-lined box, containing a superb set of jewels—brooch and ear-rings—a large diamond in each, set about with small emeralds.

"And here is my gift to you; you must wear it with the vail and wreath," and he placed in her hand a necklace of pearls.

"You are too good to me—far too good to me," murmured Myrtle, tremulously, hardly looking at the beautiful ornament. She felt as if she had wronged this generous man by ever having had a thought of another, no matter how conscientiously she now strove to forget that other.

"Come, Myrtle, you look regretful. Do you not like the

pearls? Never mind; we will change them, then. Play for me, now. I have not heard you sing for a fortnight."

He led her to the piano.

"What shall I sing? have you any choice?"

"Here is something that reads prettily; I do not think I have heard the music. Try it, and I will tell you if it pleases me."

So she began, in a trembling voice, which gradually steadied itself:

"'LIDA, lady of the land,
Hath a crowd of gallant suitors;
Squires who fly at her command;
Knights her slightest motion tutors:
She hath barons kneeling mute,
To hear the fortune of her proffers;
All—except the honest suit
JOHNNY GORDON humbly offers.

"'Lida, lady of the land,
Keep your wondrous charms untroubled,
May your wide domain expand,
May your gems and gold be doubled!
Keep your lords on bended knee!
Take all earth, and leave us lonely,
All—except you take from me
Humble Johnny Gordon only!"

Whether it were the name of Johnny alone, or whether it were the miserable fact that she had lost her humble lover, or what it was that overcome poor Myrtle so, hardly had she finished the exulting note of the more fortunate maiden in the song, than she burst into tears, and hastily fled from the room.

"Poor child! she is getting nervous," murmured Mrs. Dennison, who had come into the parlor during the singing; "don't you think she is rather young to marry, Mr. Fielding?

especially a person so much-so much-"

"More fitted to be her father, my dear lady. Well, per haps so—but it is rather late to be making such reflections. May I trouble you to take charge of this necklace, which she has forgotten? And here is a trifle which I trust you will honor me by wearing to the wedding."

The lady accepted the gift with smiles, and Hugh bowed himself out into the darkness, and walked five miles by star-

light, before he could compose himself.

CHAPTER VIII.

MYRTLE'S MOTHER.

That mysterious plot by which Hugh Fielding wished to immolate himself at the moment when he raised others to the pinnacle of happiness, was to allow the preparations for the wedding to go on, as if he were to be the bridegroom, and at the last moment, when the company was assembled, to refuse to take that important part upon himself, but allot it to John Iones, Jr., while he sank into the second place as groomsman.

But "the best laid plans will oft go wrong," as this one threatened to now, very much to his chagrin. John Jones was not to be heard from. The day and hour that his part of the contract had been finished, he had vanished from the vicinity. He was not the person to stay and lament over his misfortunes, working himself up into frenzy by watching the uappiness of another, which he coveted for himself.

He had disappeared, and to an artfully-put question, Myrtle returned such an answer, that Hugh found she was ignorant of his whereabouts. So were the uncle and the aunt. Here was a pretty kettle of fish for a man who had laboriously concocted quite a different dish. Hugh did not know, after all, but he should be under the necessity of marrying Myrtle himself, or delaying the wedding, which would be almost as bad, seeing everybody was invited, the cake baked, the dress completed, the minister engaged, and the new house put in order.

"Dear suz!" said Mrs. Jones, when he went to her cabin, to inquire about her nephew. "I hain't the least idee where the boy is. He's been gone a week now, and it wouldn't s'prise me a bit if he was 'way back to York. He's seemed homesick and discontented, lately. He was always independent, John was—goin' and comin' and doin' as he pleased. Not that he ever pleased to do any thing bad, for he didn't; there never was a better nor a smarter boy, that had had no more

opportunities, if I do say it, as am his aunt. He's never had a mother, poor boy, since he was five year old. And you come to invite him to the weddin'? it's mighty polite of you, sir; and I'm sorry he's gone off, for I know he'd have liked to go first-rate. He's always taken a shine to Miss Myrtle, and he'd like to be to her wedding, I know."

"I don't doubt that!" ejaculated her visitor; "and it's highly important he should be there. In fact, Mrs. Jones, I'm afraid Miss Myrtle will feel as if she couldn't get married

without he were present."

"You don't say so! well, it's very kind of her, to be sure; and I'm dreadful sorry he's given us the slip so. I've been over to the new house, seein' to things. The carpets is all down now, and the rooms well-aired; the kitching is furnished ready for cookin', and black Dinah is there seein' to the vittals. She'll have two more out to help her the day of the weddin', besides the waiters, and I've seen to the rooms up-stairs. Every thing is looking beautiful; the new furniture is sot in the chambers. If the fixin's for the parlors and the liberray come to-morrow, every thing will be ready in time. I wonder what made John clear out just now. He hain't eat nuthin' for a month, and seemed to be powerful quiet, but they say folks as write and make pictures is subject to such turns, and I didn't mind it in particular."

"And you don't know where a note would reach him, if I

chould try to send him one?"

"No, I don't. He may be in York State, and he may be in Mississippi. 'Twouldn't do no harm to write to Clarkville, New York, but he couldn't get it in time to come to the weddin'. Maybe he'll be back as suddingly as he went off."

"Well, if he don't, I'm afraid he'll have cause to repent it," muttered the gentleman to himself, adding aloud: "I shall look for you and Mr. Jones, at all events; don't disappoint

me."

"La! I may look in out of the kitching, where I'm helping Dinah, just when the ceremony's goin' on," responded Mrs.

Jones, with a courtesy.

"No, but I wish you to come dressed in your best, and be my guests, Mrs. Jones. This is an occasion when one wishes to see all their friends rejoicing with him—and who are more truly my friends than you and your husband." "Indeed, and I do not believe any one is, so far as that goes," replied she, looking at him with respect and admiration. "I'd have liked, right well, to have given Miss Myrtle suthin' handsome as a present; but poor folks like us has nothin' to give that would be acceptable, so I've baked the bride-cake, and a beauty it is! There's a ring in it, too—a real gold ring—which John give me to put in; and whoever gets it will be married next, they say."

"Good-day, Mrs. Jones, and if you hear from your nephew,

let me know."

"I will, immejetly, Mr. Fieldin'."

It was too bad to ruin such a striking and romantic denouement, as Hugh had consoled himself with contriving. He was walking to and fro across the lawn in front of the new house, thinking of it. It wanted but two days to that set forth in the invitations; whether to recall those, with notes worded, "deferred till further notice," or whether to allow affairs to proceed and wind up, as everybody, save himself, expected, were the two horns of this dilemma.

"That provoking young rascal! he deserves to lose all he might have gained," he muttered, kicking a wild-rose in the face, who was listening with innocent curiosity to his solilo-

quies.

"What are you treating that pretty flower so rudely for?" asked an arch voice at his elbow; he turned, growing red in the face, at being caught in such an ungentlemanly act.

"Why, Myrtle! what's brought you over here? I haven't been able to get you near this place for a fortnight. You

seem to be growing shy of your future home."

"It seems so strange to think I am to live here so soon with you—your wife—that I am almost afraid of it. But Mrs. Dennison had occasion to consult the housekeeper about the arrangements, and she insisted upon my coming along. She is in the house now, deep in consultation with Aunt Dinah; she sent me to pay my respects to you."

"I am very much obliged to Mrs. Dennison. Will you

take my arm for a stroll, little bird?"

How she started at the word! how pale she grew, and hardly with happiness, though she strove to force a smile! The little trembling hand sought his arm, and she walked by

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his side, silent, pale, abstracted. He pitied her. He saw the effort she was making to appear to be happy. He wished the farce were over. When he had reinstated her in her birthright of joy and love—when he had crowned his queen with the fullness of content—had beheld her supremely blessed, exquisitely grateful and joyous—he would be ready to retire to the melancholy shades of perpetual old bachelorhood. They came, in the course of their walk, to the same old oak-tree, under whose shadow Hugh had sat, when he saw and heard the passionate parting of the two lovers. It was evident to him that Myrtle recalled the scene, for she leaned upon his arm more heavily, and he guessed that she was weeping, from the way in which her handkerchief stole to her eyes at intervals.

"Let us sit here and rest," said Hugh, not appearing to notice her tears. "I'm so provoked, little one, to think that John Jones has gone off, without staying to the wedding." At the mention of that name he felt a quiver of the hand he held.

"Why should you-I thought-I didn't know-"

"That I cared any thing about that young scapegrace. But I do! I like and respect him much, and would have been pleased to have him present at the ceremony. I've half a mind to postpone it until he is heard from. Say, puss, do you think you could endure the disappointment?"

He was looking into her face with such a queer look, half-

serious, half-sad, as to puzzle her most completely.

"Why, Hugh, what do you mean? do you really wish Mr. Jones to be present, so much as that?—for my part, I am glad he is gone."

"Then you don't wish the ceremony deferred?"

Again she tried to read his countenance; the proposition was so novel a one for an ardent lover to make to his betrothed, for no more urgent reason than the absence of a possible guest,—and that guest a person whom he had never especially favored—that she was surprised and confused.

"In this, as in all else, I shall defer to your superior judg-

ment," she answered, presently.

"You are a dutiful child, Myrtle,—a dutiful child. You consent to marry me, out of deference to my judgment; and you are ready not to marry me, for the same all-powerful reason. I only asked you to see what reply you would make.

Well, my little girl, I want to tell you that I chanced to witness an interview which took place between you and that silly boy—"

"He isn't a boy," interrupted Myrtle, proudly.

"Between you and that silly young gentleman, from which I had reason to infer that he was deeply interested in you, and I wished him to be at your wedding."

"Oh! Mr. Fielding, I did not think you could be so cruel!"

exclaimed Myrtle, looking up at him reproachfully.

"Why shouldn't I be cruel?" he asked, setting his features into a sternness which frightened her. "I have been cruelly treated—twice I have been cruelly disappointed—is it not enough to make a man revengeful?"

"But I have tried to do right, oh! Mr. Fielding, I have tried!"

That innocent face turned to his with such a look of pain, the tears streaming down the pale cheeks, made him wish to clasp her in his arms and exclaim—

"Yes, my brave girl, and for all this girlish heroism thou

shalt have thy reward!"

While he was still debating whether it was possible for him thus suddenly to immolate himself, another person was added to the scene.

A lady came along the path from the cabin, looking about as if in search of some one. When she caught sight of Myrtle, she paused a moment and looked at her earnestly—but not more earnestly than Hugh was now regarding her. She was a fine-looking woman, of perhaps forty—she looked thirty-five—and beautiful as in her earliest youth. Her bonnet was swinging from her arm, for the day was warm. Her hair was put up in a classic braid behind, and clustered in rich ringlets down either side of her face; her cheeks were as fair as a girl's, and flushed with exercise, her form was full but graceful, and her step light.

"Is the dead alive?" gasped Hugh.

She heard and saw him not: her eyes were upon the face of the young girl. She threw her bonnet and scarf upon the grass, and ran and clasped her in her arms.

"My child—my own little Minnie! say, are you not?" she cried, holding the surprised girl away from her, so as to gaze again upon her countenance.

"I am Myrtle-Myrtle Fielding. What do you mean?" asked the young girl, confused by this unexpected apparition.

"Fielding!" said the lady, in a voice which thrilled to Hugh's inmost heart. "Hugh Fielding!—was it he who found you?"

"It was."

"And were you lost, fifteen years ago this day, upon a

prairie? Speak, speak quickly: are you my child?"

"Are you my mother?" was the response: and the two clasped hands and clung together as if they had longed for each other since the moment they were so terribly separated.

"Myrtle, do I see you again?" said a deep voice beside

them.

Both started, but it was not our Myrtle who was addressed this time. The lady gave one glance of those still glorious eyes into Hugh's, and sank fainting in his arms.

"Forgive," he heard her whisper, as her senses deserted

her.

Myrtle ran for water to the lake, while Hugh supported that beautiful head upon his bosom with a strange emotion. She was sure she saw him kissing those pale cheeks as she bastened back with her straw hat dripping from the wave.

"It was too much," said Mrs. Sherwood, as she came back to life. "It is weak and foolish for well people to faint.

But to find my child, and to find you, Hugh!"

"Whose fault was it that you ever lost me?" he asked, with bitterness, as the dreariness of twenty years returned

upon his heart.

"Not mine alone," was the reply. "That I was not firm enough in resisting the mandates of a father, who had a selfish purpose in giving me to that man, that man," she added, with a slight shudder, "who perished so fearfully, and who was the father of my child; for that I shall remember him with respect, if not affection."

When Mrs. Sherwood was recovered sufficiently to sit upon the grassy knoll under the tree, and tell the story of the past, while holding tight to her daughter's hand, she gave a brief account, which she afterward made more circumstantial, of what happened after they were surprised by the Indians and her husband murdered. Herself and her companion in suffering, the wife of the other murdered man, were driven off in the wagon; and in an attempt to escape with her child from the back of the vehicle, she had been detected, and jerked back so rudely as to cause her to drop the infant. They would not pause to pick it up, but hurried on, unmindful of her agony.

She herself chanced to have a knife in her pocket, which she resolved should liberate her by death, if no other chance of succor offered; and possibly it might be of service in secur-

ing her both life and liberty.

The first day, they left the wagon and journeyed on foot through the wilderness. Her companion sank down, and died before night. She journeyed on, urged by the speed of her tormentors, until the second night, when they bound her, hungry, weary, with bleeding feet and anguished heart, to the earth, and went off for water and food, intending to return and camp at that place. They had stopped before reaching water, because she could go no further. As soon as they disappeared down a hill-side, leaving not one to watch her, she cut the throngs which bound her, and ran for her life. She did not know, when she arose, that she could place one foot before the other; but fear and hope gave her superhuman energy. In a few minutes she came to a stream. In this she waded to put them at fault. The cool water soothed her wounded feet and revived her somewhat. She ran for a long time down the stream, until, coming to a wild place where rocks and ravines promised places of concealment, she made her way up the bank, and, by fortune, stumbled into a cavern, over which she drew the vines which had before concealed it, and lay down in the darkness, for it was now twilight. Overcome by fatigue, she fell asleep, despite her fear of wild animals and her wilder tormentors. When she awoke it was day.

All that day she did not dare to venture out. Some berries were growing among the moss at the mouth of the cave, and with a handful of these she cooled her thirst. Hearing nothing to alarm her, as soon as it again came night, keeping her knife open in her hand, she crept out, and went, as rapidly as her strength would permit, still further away from the place. She walked half the night and slept the rest. The next day

she found berries; the third, she emerged from the woods into a strange country. A single cabin told of civilization. She crawled to the door, and was received by an old woman, whose husband hunted and fished for a living. There she was ill for a month, lying on a bed of buffalo-skins; but the people were as kind to her as they knew how to be. She had some money, but they would not take it. When she was able, the old man accompanied her a couple of days till they reached the edge of a settled country, and left her. She found out that she was a hundred miles from the spot where her husband was murdered. After various trifling adventures, by begging and working, she reached her own home, where every one had long given her up for dead. Her child, she had not a doubt, was dead. They told her about Mr. Fielding's letter, and she then knew that her little babe had perished of fright and hunger in the solitary prairie.

It was several years before she recovered entirely from the effects of her suffering and grief. She had never been a happy woman. By the merest chance she had heard, only about four weeks before, of the circumstance of a child being found and adopted by a gentleman near Wakwaka. She had come, impelled by a faint hope, to that city, and there had

heard more particulars.

When she ceased her brief and hurried narrative, Hugh took the trembling hand which lay in her lap, and pressed it between his own, as if to assure her that her troubles were over.

"Dear father," whispered Myrtle in his ear, "don't you think you could be persuaded to let me pass as your little daughter, again?"

"Go, puss," he said, laughing, "and find and bring back that boy you sent off in such a hurry, some weeks ago."

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CHAPTER IX.

THE HAPPY CONSUMMATION.

MYRTLE did not return with Mrs. Dennison that afternoon; but the rest of that day and evening were spent with her newly-found mother, in a private parlor of the hotel.

"Isn't it odd? I wish you could wear my wedding-dress,

mother, but I guess it will hardly fit you."

"And if it would, it would scarcely be appropriate. It will not be long before you will need it yourself, I fear!"

It was Myrtle's turn now to blush.

"Seven o'clock. Hugh was to be here at seven;" and the lady looked at the tiny watch in her belt as impatiently as if she were sweet sixteen, instead of fair and forty.

"And here he is," said he, stepping in at the moment.

"I have come for your answer, Mrs. Sherwood. You know you arrived just in time to help me out of an embarrassing dilemma. The cards are all out for a wedding—shall there be one—or must there be cake baked to no purpose? Dinah will be in despair, and everybody disappointed. I, for one, shall go wild with disappointment."

"It seems a strange exchange," murmured the blushing

widow, looking at her lovely daughter.

"But appropriate, I am convinced," continued the gentleman.

"Oh, mamma, do not refuse. You expect to consent sometime, and the sooner the better. It will be so charming! We will surprise every one! I will not even confide it to Mrs. Dennison. No one will know who the bride really is to be, until we take our places upon the floor. I will wear my dress, and be your bride-maid. Oh! I think it will be very charming!" Hugh looked at her radiant countenance; he had not seen her so much like her own self since he had refused to her the relation of father; he realized more vividly than ever what a foolish thing he would have done to have shadowed and chilled that sunny brightness.

"If it's jealousy of your daughter which causes you to hesi

tate, I assure you that I have had no intention of marrying her;" here both the ladies showed their surprise in their expression. "But let me sit here, on this sofa, where I can talk at ease, and I'll tell you all about it. I was just on the point of explaining myself to this little girl here, when you come to the rescue, my dear lady. You must know that I overheard a certain tear-bedewed and magnificently-heroic interview between two good-looking young people, who mutually avowed their willingness to break their own hearts, and their firm determination to secure the happiness of a certain selfish old bachelor at the price of all their hopes, wishes, and peace of mind generally."

"Not being minded to permit such suicidal proceedings, and being touched by the degree of devotion shown for the wretched old bachelor, I secretly interested myself in their case. The youth was about to fly the country, but I detained him by force of a contract which I held between us, thinking that when the time had come to sacrifice the ogre who—"

"Now, father, I won't hear to such slander," again interrupted the young girl, and he felt a soft hand upon either cheek, and a kiss impeded the progress of his narrative.

"Who stood between them and felicity, that I should need his aid in carrying out my little plot, which was nothing less romantic than to lead the mourning bride before the priest, only to act as god-father, and give her away to the melancholy youth, suddenly summoned from the slough of despond to the mountain-top of happiness."

"Is it possible!" again interposed the wondering voice. .

"I confess now, that there was a touch of the dramatic in my little scheme; but it consoled me for my own loss, and gave me comfort and amusement in dreaming it out, when, otherwise, I might have been falling into a decline. However, my pretty plot was all disarranged by the flight of the principal actor, and I was in a fine state of alarm and perplexity, when your ladyship appeared upon the stage. I was actually afraid that I should have to marry the little minx myself, to stop the gossips who had been invited, and to keep the bridecake from being a total loss!"

"What a delightful man you are, Mr. Fielding! If John only knew of it," murmured Myrtle to herself, in a whisper.

"What did you say, my child?"

"Oh, nothing, papa. I was just thinking-

"What a pity it was that John had run away. It is a pity, indeed. We might have two weddings in one, and save time, trouble, and expense, you know."

"What is the name of this future son-in-law of mine?"

asked Mrs. Sherwood, with a smile.

"John Jones, Jr.," answered Mr. Fielding. "A beautiful name," he added, maliciously, "very aristocratic, and to a romantic young girl, I should think it would be enough of itself. Some of his relatives are fashionable people. That was his aunt I

introduced to you, in the cabin, Mrs. Sherwood."

"What's in a name?" asked Myrtle, with a flushing cheek.

"I'd marry a man, if I loved him, if his name was Nebuchadnezzer. And as for his aunt, she's as warm-hearted and excellent a woman as there is in the world. She'd be much truer to me in sickness or misfortune than any of these 'fashionable relatives' would. John is poor now, dear mother, but he will soon be independent, if not rich, with his genius—for he has genius, mamma—and I love him, which is enough. There's nothing should ever induce a young girl to marry except love—"

"Or duty," interposed Mr Fielding.

"I don't know," answered Myrtle, "I may have carried my sense of duty too far—I think now I did. No matter—I know you will love John, and be proud of him, mamma."

"I don't doubt it, my darling. I wish he were here this evening. I shall be the last person to oppose you upon grounds of riches or policy. It was that part, played by a parent, which blighted my life," she sighed, and looked away sadly, as at a dreary past which she saw in space before her.

"Do not talk of blight," said Hugh; "your life shall blossom again. We will forget that we are not as young as Myrtle and John. We will think it is in frolic only that we call them our children—as little girls do their dolls,"—she smiled—"and now, I take it for granted, that I have your consent to have the arrangements proceed."

Mrs. Dennison was surprised at the excessive lightness of spirits of her fair charge the day preceding the wedding. Brides elect are usually thoughtful, if not positively mel-

ancholy, at the near approach of so important an event; but Myrtle was like a thistle-down, dancing upon a summer breeze. No one was made acquainted with the fact that the lady at the hotel was her mother; Mrs. Sherwood passed for an intimate friend of Mr. Fielding's, who had been invited to

the coming festival.

At last the important evening arrived; gay parties went from Wakwaka out to the brilliantly-illuminated new mansion where the ceremony was to be performed. The large parlors were thronged; curiosity and interest were at the height; the usual buzz and flutter which precedes the entrance of the bridal-party took place. To Mrs. Dennison was assigned the honor of receiving the guests—a situation she was eminently qualified to fill gracefully. That lady herself was not entirely at ease in her mind. She was too keen an observer not to see that something mysterious was hovering about. When she had stepped into Myrtle's dressing-room to herself put the finishing touches to her toilet, the young girl had playfully refused to have her vail put on.

"Wait until the last moment," she said; "Mrs. Sherwood

will arrange it for me, if I wish it."

Mrs. Dennison cast a jealous look at that lady, and retired. It was no wonder that she felt hurt to find herself supplanted by this stranger, after years of motherly care of her pupil. Besides, the lady was about her own age, and much handsomer; she was obliged to confess to herself that Mrs. Sherwood was beautiful, as she saw her that evening, flitting about Myrtle, arranging her hair and dress. She wore, the strange lady did, a rich full dress of dove-color, without any ornament, save her own splendid hair, fastened with a gold comb, and decked with a few scarlet flowers. A flush, as soft and fitful as that of youth, hovered on her cheeks, and her eyes were brilliant and tender.

"You look lovely to-night, mother," whispered Myrtle.

There was but one thing which dissatisfied the young girl now; which was the absence of her own lover, whom she wanted to stand with her as groomsman, she being bridemaid to her mother. In his place she was obliged to accept a young gentleman of the village, agreeable and graceful enough, and only not perfect because he was not John Jones.

When the bridal-party came into the thronged parlors, and silence fell upon the assembly, surprise was the one emotion with which the guests beheld Hugh Fielding taking as his wife that strange lady by his side, unknown to every one of them, and Myrtle playing the part of bridemaid.

One person there was in that throng with whom surprise was also infinite joy. Standing out upon the portico, too sad to enter, not wishing to be seen. yet unable to stay away, lingered John Jones, who had returned to the scenes of his disappointment upon the day set to seal his unhappiness, thinking that he would steal one secret glance at the bride, in her beauty, then retreat to darkness and solitude, without disturbing her serenity by a sight of his wretchedness.

But as this meaning change in the programme dawned upon him, he lingered in a dream of joy, doubting his senses, obtruding further through the window into the room.

"Law suz!" exclaimed Mrs. Jones, who had made her way forward to congratulate "the happy pair," and to express her wonder at the turn events had taken; "if there ain't John a peeking in the window!"

"You don't say so! nothing could be more fortunate! run,

child, and get your vail," exclaimed Mr. Fielding.

The blushing youth was dragged in by the exultant bridegroom, regardless of traveling attire, or stammered excuses; Myrtle's timid refusals were set at naught.

"This night, or never, his bride thou shalt be!" cried Hugh. Some one brought the bridal vail and orange wreath from the chamber; the young pair stood up, and before they could realize their own delicious, unexpected happiness, they were receiving congratulations as Mr. and Mrs. John Jones.

Need any thing further be said of all the world of conjecture and romantic gossip which floated about that evening? That double wedding is still fresh in the memory of the guests, and the history of the beautiful Child of the Prairie is cherished among the annals of the city of Wakwaka.

Beadle's Dime Novels, No. 24,

TO ISSUE SATURDAY, JUNE 1st,

WILL COMPRISE

THE TRAIL HUNTERS;

OR,

MONOWANO, THE SHAWNEE SPY.

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